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Angling idylls.



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ANGLING IDYLLS....

BY

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OUR SCHOOL FIELD CLUB," ETC.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE:
THE MILL	I
AN OCTOBER MORNING	14
THE LINN	27
AN ANGLER'S HOLIDAY	39
I. HOME	39
II. UP WITH THE LARK	47
III. THE PORTRAIT OF AN ANGLER	51
IV. ON A COTTAGE DOOR	54
V. AMONG THE CARP	60
VI. KITTEN FISHING	71
VII. THE MERES	73
VIII. COEDYRALLT	83
IX. THE HAPPY VALLEY	92

	PAGE
ANGLING ACQUAINTANCES (ANIMALS, BIRDS, &c.)	102
WATERSIDE PLANTS	133
BREAM FISHING	147
RAIN	160
THE RUSTIC ANGLER	167
A MONSTER PIKE	177
ON SOME ODD WAYS OF FISHING	186
AN ANGLER'S ROMANCE	194

ANGLING IDYLLS.

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THE MILL.

IT is May-day, and the earth is dressed in a fair new garment of green ; the copious showers of the day before yesterday, followed by yesterday's brilliant sunshine and warm south wind, have made the leaves rush forth with a sudden bound from the buds which hitherto have been so jealously closed. To-day the bright sunshine pours out of a cloudless sky upon a green world, which in its vividness of colour seems to be gifted with the lustrous transparency of the sky itself.

On such a day it were a shame to stay indoors and see nothing bluer than foolscap—nothing greener than writing fluid ; besides, this morning our rod fell from its bracket when no one was near. The housemaid said it was a strong breeze through the open window which dislodged it, but that is all nonsense. It was the spirit

of the spring which moved it to protest against inaction on such a day. We are not superstitious, but we dare not disregard such a warning ; therefore let us take our trusty rod in our hand, and wander forth to revel in the sight of the blue sky and the green woods, so delightful after the discomforts of a long and cruel winter.

Whither shall we go ? What need to ask ? There is but one stream in the verdant valley, and wherever we strike it our steps are sure to be irresistibly led, upwards or downwards as the case may be, to the mill, which for a century has nestled among the great trees in the heart of the valley, and has been so frequented by angling visitors that it has earned the name of the Angler's Paradise.

Our way lies over meadows yellow with the low-flowered celandine, the taller and more kingly buttercups, and scattered clumps of nodding cowslips. It is a field of cloth of gold, the whole of this low ground ; but in lieu of gaudily-bedecked knights and horses, there are only our sober selves clad in homely grey, and red and white satin-flanked cows to view its loveliness.

The hedges look like the spray of a waterfall turned into emeralds, and set with the pearly white of the blossoming thorns. On the uppermost branch of a tall hazel clump a thrush is singing with all his heart, his fawn-coloured throat throbbing with the music of

his voice ; while not far off his mate is sitting on her blue eggs, and listening proudly to his matrimonial epithalamium.

In the pauses of his song you can hear another and a merrier one, dropping faintly down from that speck in the dazzling blue, which you know to be a lark.

Ah, there, too, is the first swallow skimming over that still pool, on which the white ranunculus flowers lie in such perfect purity ; and hark ! was that a cuckoo ? or was it but a dove, whose voice is so tremulous with the happiness of his recent wedding that his coo-o is broken into two syllables ?

How welcome is each sight and sound that indicates the advancing spring ; how impossible it is to be sad on such a day !

There is the brook sparkling over gravelly fords, and circling slowly in quiet pools, its foambells sparkling in the sunshine. It has cleared so rapidly after the rain that only in the deeps is it a pale amber colour ; elsewhere the water is blue, or golden, or brown, or black, as the shadows fall. The gravel shines, and the blue sky is reflected ; but everywhere there is white and sparkling foam in lines and splashes.

Rigging up our rod and flies, we wade knee-deep among the broad-leaved butterburs, and with a wave of the rod the glistening line is despatched on its

deadly mission, and at the very first cast a trout is hooked, and in another moment is breathing its last among the daisies and silver seed-globes of the yellow-flowered dandelions. Its struggles ere it is seized shake out hundreds of the shuttlecock seeds, and they float away on the south wind over the meadows.

So on we go up the brook, pulling up a trout from this pool where the water swirls under the over-hanging roots of an oak, and a troutlet from that merrily rippling shallow. Although the water is just the right colour, the sun is too bright for very good sport, but we like the bright sunshine, and the additional pleasure it gives to our waterside ramble more than atones for a lighter basket.

Now we enter a wood, where the oaks and the alders crowd too thickly over the stream for us to fish it. We stroll quietly along the mossy glades and mark the lady-fern unfolding its curled fronds among the pale, sweet-smelling primrose clumps, and the delicate white, purple-veined bell flowers of the wood sorrel drooping over its triple, heart-shaped leaves. Between the tree stems a white butterfly flits; the squirrels frisk among the branches overhead, and peer inquisitively at us; from clumps of bracken—the tawny russet of the last year's growth, and the tender green of this—a tiny rabbit, who has come out of his mother's burrow for a first tour of inspection, sits up

on his haunches, and stares solemnly at us ; while the atmosphere of the wood is thrilling and quivering with music, the melodies of a hundred birds, and the hum of a million insects, toned down into a sweet and all-pervading harmony.

There is the mill, separated from the wood by a meadow's breadth, and such a meadow!—a perfect blaze of spring flowers, that part of it which margins the brook white with nodding cardamines. The stream itself is broad and shallow, and its quiet current slides over trailing masses of weed that wave in the water like a maiden's tresses in a summer breeze.

The mill is a large, grey, irregular building—a farmhouse as well as a mill. Its massive walls are stained with age, and the ivy clothes them here and there with a mantle of glossy green. The huge, black, moss-stained wheel creaks slowly around. It is an over-shot wheel, and the water pours down upon it from the sluice above in an iron-grey column, broken and changed into silver as it splashes and drips from the floats of the wheel. To the left is a broad sloping weir of great height, down which the water dashes with a thousand sparkles, and boils and bubbles in the great pool beneath, whence it is glad to slip quietly away over the sleepily waving weeds.

From beneath the wheel, the water, having done its work for the present, hurries away deep and black along a narrow channel, overhung with water docks and

grasses, knotted rushes, and "water scorpions" (which, when the blue flowers smile at us we call forget-me-nots), until it rejoins its parent stream a little lower down. Here, experience has taught us, there will be a great trout lurking, and we take two of our flies off our cast, leaving only one, that they may not catch in the rushes and spoil our sport. Then creeping on hands and knees through the cool meadow grasses, we cautiously cast our fly upon the narrow torrent. At the third cast there is a quiet circle in the water—big trout rise leisurely—and an electric tug as we strike announces to us the pleasant fact that we have hooked a nice fish. There is not much room for him to fight, and in a few minutes we have led him into the shallow brook below, and there at last he lies upon the yellow gravel, a silver-bellied, red-spotted beauty, of quite two pounds in weight.

"Ah, you rascal!" cries a voice from an upper window of the mill, "you have caught my best trout. Now just take a cast over the pool below the weir, and then come in and have some dinner. It will be ready in ten minutes. Now, no excuses—you *must* be hungry after catching such a fish."

That is the miller—a Tennysonian miller.

I see the wealthy miller yet,
His double chin, his portly size,
And who that knew him could forget,
The busy wrinkles round his eyes?

The slow, wise smile that round about
His dusty forehead drily curled,
Seemed half within, and half without,
And full of dealings with the world.

A heavy dinner in the middle of the day does not agree with us, but the miller would not be pleased if we declined his invitation, and we *are* hungry, so after landing another trout—a small one this time—we prop up our rod against the porch, and enter the mill.

We have a pleasant family dinner in the low-ceilinged, oak-wainscoted dining-room, through the open windows of which a pleasant fragrance comes in from a large, old-fashioned flower garden. At one end of the table the miller presides, jovial in appearance and talk. At the other end the miller's wife is his exact prototype. We are a great favourite of hers, for because the labour of the brain gives us a somewhat pale and preoccupied look, she imagines we are delicate, and what woman can resist the pleasure of doctoring somebody? Therefore, she supplies us with fresh eggs, beautiful milk, almost solid cream, and such other country dainties which she imagines, and rightly so, we cannot get in perfection in the town. She gives us also dandelion tea, and tea made of some other herbs, notwithstanding our protestations that in town we could get something equally nasty. But in her eyes no good thing—always excepting bonnets and dresses—can come out of the town, and rarely do we

pay her a visit but she insists on our taking—in her presence, mark you, for she will not accept our promise—a wineglassful of some intensely bitter decoction. Bless her heart, though ! she is a dear old lady.

Then, there is the miller's eldest son, and his wife, with three or four little ones, who have already made a successful raid upon our pockets. There is no maiden "miller's daughter" here, but the youngest daughter, who was married a year ago, has now come home with her babe to "make her boast" to her delighted grandpapa and grandmamma. All at the table are jolly and merry and happy, save one, the only one we have not yet mentioned. He is the miller's younger brother, but to look at him he seems much older than the miller. He was an artist, whose pictures were beginning to sell. Then he met with a love disappointment, which upset his unstable nature. He went utterly and irredeemably to the bad, and now, half imbecile, and wearily waiting for the end, he has accepted the shelter of his brother's home. Miserable as he is, however, his artistic perceptions have not altogether left him, and now he looks more animated and happy, because he has been sitting in the shadow-flecked orchard, between the masses of white and sunlit blossoms, and has been watching the play and dance of the water as it sweeps over the weir ; the thrush singing in the apple tree, the lark in the blue sky, and the gay-coloured chaffinch building its lichened

nest in a fork of the splendidly-blooming cherry tree. The gladness of the spring has permeated even him, and to-day his presence is less like a cloud in the sunshine of their home happiness.

Country people themselves seem to wake to a new life and cheeriness with the spring, and their cheeriness is infectious. We pity the man who has no friends in the country whom he may visit, and from whom experience such a hearty welcome that it makes him better pleased with himself. He thinks he must have some merit in himself to evoke such heartiness from others.

Dinner is over, but the miller has some capital port, which it would be a shame to leave untasted, and he likes a chat with a guest from the town. Then cigars, or, more fitted to the time and place, long churchwardens, are produced, and the somnolent effect of the soothing weed disinclines us to exertion. Hence it is that the afternoon slips rapidly away, and we are in no hurry to resume our fishing. At last, however, the spell is broken. From one of the windows the long stretch of dead water above the weir is visible. It is a famous place for trout. On hot days you can see great fellows of three and four pounds weight, lazily floating about in the clear water. No angler leaves the mill without trying to catch one, but most anglers leave it without having caught one. The banks are steep and thickly wooded, and fly-fishing is impossible. The miller will not allow

worms to be used there. These big fish are his pets, and he chuckles at the ineffectual attempts of anglers to throw a fly over the spotted beauties, or, having succeeded in throwing a fly, to induce them to take it.

Now, about fifty yards above the weir, just under an alder bush, a big fish has been rising at intervals of a few minutes for the last hour. An angler's patience can stand such a sight no longer, and we knock the ashes out of our pipe, mark it in pencil with our initials that it may be kept for our use on a future occasion, lay it down reverently, and sally forth to seize our rod, the miller following with a sly smile on his ruddy face, ready to break into a ponderous laugh at our approaching defeat. But during the winter we have been plotting dark deeds. We know full well that these huge trout will not look at an ordinary fly, so we have constructed the image of a large green caterpillar, curled up in the most natural manner. As we attach it to our line the miller's face grows solemn, and he shakes his head, but says nothing. We twist the rod around until the line is rolled around the top like thread on a reel. Then we creep cautiously along the bank to just above the alder bush. Our position is perilous. The bank is steep and slippery ; our foothold is scant—we are, alas ! obliged to crush a tuft of primroses with our boot—and the water below us is deep.

There is the trout. His weight can surely not be less than four pounds and a half. He does not see us. We quietly insert the point of the rod through the bushes, and unroll the line so that the caterpillar descends towards the water in exactly the same manner that a real caterpillar does, suspended by his silken thread. When it is about six inches from the water, we pause and hold it so for a few seconds, while the big trout is watching it. Then we let it fall suddenly on the water. The trout rises at once, and with a quick chop of his big jaws, he has the bait, and—hurrah! he is hooked. The miller's sympathies are now with the angler who has performed so redoubtable a deed. He shouts "Hold him tight! don't let him have his head." Very good advice this, but impossible to follow, for the trout has got his head, and darts off up-stream at a racing pace, leaving diverging waves of water behind him. The line is rapidly whisked off the reel. Our heavily-bending rod tells us how futile would be the effort to check him in his mad career. The situation is critical. Our line is nearly run out. We cannot follow along the bank; the last inch is now off the reel.

"Throw your rod in after him." The advice comes too late. There is a sharp struggle forty yards up the stream; the gut gives way, and the

line flies back among the bushes in sticky folds. Oh, horror!

What to us remains of good?

Anathema Maranatha! Despair! Tare and 'ouns! Frantic gesticulations and lamentations! To hook him so cleverly and then to lose him! Hath earth any sorrow like this? The miller consoles us to the best of his ability and offers us a pipe. His wife says a cup of tea—not dandelion—will do us good. We doubt it—our feelings are too severely lacerated—but we will try. Bless these people, how they do eat! Breakfast at half-past seven; lunch at half-past ten; dinner at one; tea at half-past four; and supper at half-past eight. Why, at home, we only have two meals in the course of the day—breakfast and dinner, for a biscuit in the middle of the day cannot be called a meal.

Tea does console us, a pipe does also console us; and, after a romp with the children in the orchard, we feel happy again, though still regretting the loss of so fine a fish.

The busy murmur of the mill ceases. The dappled cows come wading through the brook to be milked; we catch a few more small trout; the sun goes down in a sea of amber, crimson splashed and spotted; the white mists wreath around the coppices of oak

and fir; the bats wheel and scream in the still air, and—we go in to supper. Then there comes a rubber or two of whist, a farewell pipe and a glass of grog, and with a fair basketful of trout—a bottle of dandelion tea in one pocket of our coat, a spring chicken in another, and laden with a posy of cowslips and primroses gathered by the children for the dear partner of our joys and purse, we shake hands with the miller and his wife, and bid good-night to the dear old mill and its inhabitants.

AN OCTOBER MORNING.

THE white mists of an October morning rise quietly and sluggishly, like a sleeper just awakened, from the damp meadows, the green hue of which is strewn and dashed with the yellow and grey of the long, dead bents and the faded summer grasses. The soft mysterious mist rolls slowly away, flowing down with glacial motion from the hollows of the wood, where the dead leaves lie in wet masses of tawny brown and orange and purple black. Down a narrow path between the tall, though broken and dying, bracken which hangs in dripping sadness over the soft path, we step with loitering tread, armed with our rod and creel. For what fish we on such a cool, still morn? For pike or lordly salmon? trout or dashing perch? No, the still quietude of this windless autumn morn has seemed to us to present a favourable opportunity for the capture of some of the silver-sided roach that run in the calmer reaches of the river, winding through the valley below

us ; the valley that only a few minutes ago was invisible from the higher ground upon which we then stood, so enveloped was it in its shroud of mist. The valley now presents a patchwork appearance, for while the natural tints of green and yellow are invisible in many a place, and the river shines with the dull gleam of frosted silver between rows of shadowy willows, yet in every dip and hollow the mist clings as loath to part from its bride of the night.

We rest for a few minutes on the crooked and lichened stile at the edge of the wood to gaze at the scene below us. It is half repellent and half attractive, yet wholly beautiful with a chaste, cold beauty. The vagueness and uncertainty imparted to the breadth of meadow by the changing mists ; the indistinct outlines ; the strange weird mystery of the still, white river with its curving reaches, upon which the yellow leaves of the willows float in increasing numbers, are sad and uncanny ; and the low bushes with their brown branches gleaming wet with the mist, and hung with myriad waterdrops, look cold and cheerless. We hesitate to leave the warmer shelter of the wood, and we look back at it with the air of one who leaves a friend for a long journey. There may be waterkelpies and elves lurking in the river valley, among the sedges and under the mantle of mist, while here in the wood there is nothing but the faint, shy rustle of the curled-

up leaves as they crack from their parent branches and flutter downward into the brake and brambles, to form a thickening carpet through which the red-coated squirrel bounds with a quick patter, and the conies dash with a great flurry and disturbance of matter.

To the eastward, beyond the wood and through its sombre glades, the sky is of a pale and perfect green, but low down against the crest of the hill which shows dark and serrated upon it, it is brightening with a white light. Presently there is the dazzle of the sun above the horizon, and with a sudden attack its rays shoot through the woods, at first with a steely radiance, but quickly brightening and strengthening until the brown of the wood is turned into crimson, the yellow into burning gold, and the green of the mosses and the hardier ferns into a brilliant emerald. The wood is now a mass of gorgeous colours.

As wine makes glad the heart of man and drives away for the time the pressing weight of care and sorrow, so the magic wine of the sunlight gives the radiance of health and life and beauty to the damp and decay and sadness of this autumn wood.

And now a wren begins to sing shrilly in the under-wood ; a robin on yonder gate flicks its tail and expands its red breast, and with a derisive cock of his eye at the sober-coated little wren in the bramble bush below him, bursts into a clearer and fuller song and then stops,

quite expecting that he has overpowered and silenced mistress wren. But Kitty is well satisfied with herself. She cares not for any robin though he is God's cock and she is God's hen. She is an advocate of woman's rights, and so she goes on with her contented and thankful twitter—very sweet it is if one listens properly—and flits about with a keen eye for things eatable, and heedless of the showers of wet she shakes upon her little brown back from the purple-streaked blackberry leaves.

And now we turn again towards the river, and, lo ! the mists are fleeing hither and thither in dire confusion and melting away before the brightness of the sun. The dewdrops look no longer cold and cheerless, but are sparkling diamond-like under the fairy wand of a sunbeam.

Now, let us delay no longer, but to our fishing ! so, with well waterproofed boots on our feet, we stride heedlessly through the soaked grass and strike the river at a favourite spot. And while we rig up our tackle—leisurely, for it is yet full early to begin—let us discourse some little of the fish we are to catch, in the manner of our honoured master the rambler by the Lea, and, we hope, to the edification of his younger disciples.

First, let us give our quarry the honour of his proper name, for in this eastern county, where the rustics' wits are as slow as their rivers, the roach suffers the indignity

of being classed with the bream and called by the family name of "white fish."

Cyprinus rutilus, then, is its scientific name, but we wonder how that fine fat fellow which has just risen to the surface and smelt at a tiny leaflet to see if it were digestible, would feel if he knew that he bore such a grand name—Ah, Mr. C. Rutilus, we will show you such a dainty morsel by-and-by.

Walton says that the roach "is a fish of no great reputation for his dainty taste, and his spawn is accounted much better than any other part of him, and you may take notice, that as the carp is accounted the water-fox for his cunning, so the roach is accounted the water sheep for his simplicity or foolishness." This charge of "simplicity or foolishness," however, is only partially true of the roach. In waters where small ones abound, they are greedy and silly enough, and the veriest tyro may catch them. Also in semi-tidal waters where the stream runs somewhat brackish and the mud at the bottom is foul, such as the lower reaches of the Yare, the big roach may be taken in great numbers by anyone who can hold a rod over the side of the boat. Such fishing requires but little skill (and what is anything without the exercise of skill), and such roach fishers rank a very long way below the trout fisher. But where the roach is at his best—such places as this river on whose banks we stand, whose deep, clear water

slips gently over trailing weed, and rounds from the foot of a golden and green-striped shallow into a slowly eddying and blackly deep pool—it is fine work fishing for him. With a pole one could leap over the river in any place, yet that hole a little lower down is fully fourteen feet deep. It holds many an ancient roach of portentous size, whose size protects it from the jack which also inhabit it.

In fresh, clear water like this, the roach are shy-biting creatures, and it needs considerable skill to catch them. We have seen an angler who could kill a fair basketful of trout on the brightest day at Coquet-side, fail to maintain his reputation when roach-fishing in this stream. One's tackle must be of the finest. Many anglers, especially London ones, who are great roach anglers, use footlinks a single horsehair thick ; but we are inclined to think this a refinement of luxury, for gut is now drawn so fine as to be practically invisible in the clearest water, and it is stronger than hair. The rod should be long and light, and the baits, if natural ones or paste, should be perfectly clean and fresh. Yet all these things avail nothing if the angler's eye be not quick, his attention unflagging, and his wrist supple and dexterous in striking.

A clear river roach, his stomach and his strength being unimpaired by gross feeding, fights well for some time ; and supposing he is over half-a-pound in weight,

and you are using fine tackle, a landing-net will be found extremely useful. On the present occasion we have one slung at our back, and it can be unhooked in a moment when required for use.

There are many ways of fishing for this handsome fish—for handsome he is, with his silver scales, his red fins, and his yellow eyes. You may fish for him in muddy water with worms. You may use wasp grubs, or gentles, or pastes of various mixture. On hot days you may dib for him with a natural fly under the bushes which overhang the still deeps, when you may catch some large ones. Or, better still, you may fly-fish for him wherever he is, with a "black gnat" on your casting-line, and the hook tipped with a tiny bit of kid glove. This is a very killing way when the fish are playing about on the feed on summer evenings, but it needs a quick eye to see and a quick hand to strike as soon as a tiny circle is made upon the limpid stream. Best of all, however—because the roach is then at his best and strongest, and the big ones are more inclined to take the angler's bait—it is to fish as we are ~~doing~~ now, in chill October.

On a mild, still day, and (if the water is much fished) soon after sunrise, when the fish have had a night's rest to make them less suspicious, a good basket ought to be made in fairly-stocked waters.

And now let us delay no longer. The sun has been

long enough on the water to rouse the fish to a knowledge that it must be breakfast-time.

Our float, you see, is a light porcupine quill, and our hook is small and fine ; six inches above it is one tiny shot. Our bait is a piece of paste, the size of a green pea, made of new white bread, carefully kneaded with clean hands until it is tough and sticky. Where we commence the water is about five feet deep, and at the bottom long masses of weed are swaying over smooth, yellow gravel. Peering downward, at first we see nothing but the dark-green weeds ; but as our eyes become accustomed to the deeper shade we see, a foot above the gravel, in the clear runs between the weeds, a dozen or more fine roach, their heads up the stream, and with gently swaying tails. They look dull-brown objects as they now swim, but every now and then there is a sudden gleam in the water as one of them darts aside to seize some speck of food, and shows his shining flank. We approach the sedgy margin silently and carefully, and crouching down on one knee, we throw our line lightly up stream, and watch the white bit of paste as it sinks slowly down, until, supported by the float, it glides along, at the right depth, towards the noses of the eagerly-gazing roach. The first one, who is nearly two pounds in weight, sails up to it, and then drops backward down stream, keeping his mouth just an inch below the bait, and

examining it suspiciously. It is a moment of anxious suspense. Will he, or will he not take it? No! he is too cautious. He does not feel quite sure about it, and so he turns aside and lets it pass. Then it floats right on to the nose of a pounder, and he just sucks it nonchalantly in. We strike, and he is hooked, and gamely struggling to reach the weeds, but his fate is sealed, and we lead him into our landing-net, whence he is transferred into our basket.

When we next cast in, the big roach again goes up to it, but this time he turns tail in great alarm, and darts down stream and into a bed of weeds. But a half-pound fish lower down rushes in where the wise roach feared to tread, and is duly basketed. Then, for three or four swims we get no bites, for in such clear water the fish are soon alarmed, but after awhile we catch two more small ones.

Now we will leave this clear reach, and try that deep pool below, where a few tiny circlets on the surface show that some big roach are feeding—for the bigger a roach is the more delicately does he poke his nose out of his own element. We cannot see the fish, for the water is too deep and black, so, pushing ourselves into a bed of tall and crackling reeds, we drop our line into the water at the head of the pool, and watch the float slowly circling round in the eddy. Presently it gives a sharp jerk or

two; that is the bite of a small one, and, on striking, we find that our bait has disappeared. At the next swim, just as our float reaches the tail of the pool, it stops, and slowly sinks. The hook has either caught in the bottom, or it is the bite of a big fish. We strike and find that we are fast in a good one. It gives two or three vigorous dashes, just like a trout, and then submits to be turned shorewards. At the sight of the landing-net, however, it makes a further and prolonged effort, which causes our slender rod to bend and spring with great vivacity. With our fine tackle, and hampered as we are by the reeds, the slightest flurry might cause us to lose it, but we are cool and patient, so in another minute the fish is safe within the circle of the net. His weight is within an ounce of two pounds, therefore we may call him a very good roach indeed.

In the course of the next half-hour we catch three or four more, and all good ones. Then, as we pull out a small one about six inches long, we see a shadow dart out from under the bank, and a gleam and twist in the water. That was a jack of four or five pounds in weight, and evidently on the feed. In spite of the fineness of our tackle, we will try for him, so we tie three or four hooks to the end of the line, and, with the small roach for bait, we improvise a spinning tackle. Casting it

into the water, we work it close to the bank. In an instant there is a swirl in the water, and a flash of green and gold—for jacks have now a bravely mottled flank—and as the jaws of *Esox Lucius* close upon the bait with a savage tug, our thin gut line is severed and flies back in the air in glistening coils, and the jack retires to his den—oh! with toothpicks gratis, while we repair our tackle and meditate upon the folly of too vast an ambition.

Yet a little lower down stream, and we come to a spot where it flows broad and shallow, with lanes of clear water between long quivering tresses of weeds, which are being slowly combed by the sunken leaves and twigs which the current forces through them. In these lanes of water the roach are well on the feed, and every swim we get a bite. In two hours we have caught a goodly number, many of them half-a-pound in weight, and two of them over a pound each. Then they cease biting, and after trying in vain for some time, we look round to ascertain the cause. The eastern sky has grown pale and cold, and there is a thin line of dark, hard-edged cloud resting athwart it. We also become sensible of a keenness in the air, and we find that the wind has gone round to the east. The ripples already shimmering on the water tell us that a strong easterly wind is springing up, and so good-bye to our fishing.

We wander downward, just throwing in now and then for form's sake, and note the few things the autumn winds and rains have left us. Here is a late tuft of the yellow loose-strife; there the green blossoms of the ivy, which wreaths round that slanting pollard. Yonder a bed of tall nettles, covered with the fading yellow of the parasitic dodder, and here the greenish spikes of the mercury goose-foot, or Good King Henry. On this marsh the tall bulrushes bend their rich brown heads to the easterly air, and in this small, rush-fringed lagoon the floating duck-weed is scattered by the rising of a mallard.

On this mud-bank is the seal of an otter, and the track of his broad foot, together with the tail part of an eel off which he has breakfasted. Across the river a water-rat swims under the water, its compressed fur gleaming with silvery air-bubbles, and the ubiquitous waterhen flutters from the sedges.

All around are the glowing reds, and browns, and yellows of the sad, sweet autumn time. Leaves, fragrant in decay, flutter against us; starlings chatter in the reeds, and rise in a whirling cloud; and the rooks wheel and tumble in the grey sky above us.

In our hearts there is a restful peace, tinged with a pleasant melancholy, and so we walk on in full content, and come to a tiny, straw-thatched and moss-covered cottage, set in its little garden, close by the water's-

edge. Here live an old couple, all by themselves, cheered only by the occasional visit of a child or grand-child. Old Morris was a farm labourer ; then, as he grew old, a stone-breaker ; and now he is too old and too rheumatic for that. It is a wonder how the old couple live. They have a plot of garden in which they grow a few potatoes, but their crop has been bad this year ; and we know from one who sometimes befriends them that times are hard with them, and that they have lived for a week together on the fish caught by the old man, who was a deft angler in his youth. There he is now sitting on a stool by the water-side, and patiently waiting for a bite, with greater interest, we cannot but know, than we ever did ; for his dinner depends upon the anxiety of the fish to take theirs. He is shivering with the cold, and looks anything but comfortable. On the grass, behind him, lies one small fish, and he is not likely now to catch any more. He does not see us, and he is as deaf as a post, so we turn out the contents of our basket to add to his one fish, reserving, however, a brace of the best for ourselves.

When old Morris discovers the addition to his store will he think, we wonder, that the miracle of the loaves and fishes has been repeated ? and with what additional fervour will his good wife thank the Lord, when she finds half-a-crown in the belly of the biggest roach.

THE LINN.

VERY bright and pleasant are the pictures which cross the mental view of the Angler in his hours of rest. The hard-worked lawyer, politician, or merchant may throw himself back in his easy-chair after dinner, and escape from the cares of his business to wander in green fields and by flowing streams. To him there appear pictures so vivid that he smiles to himself as he thinks of the deep impression made upon his mind by the beauty he saw in those bygone days of sport, and free, wild wanderings. One picture may arise a hundred times, but it is none the less vivid for that, and none the less welcome. He can live over again that gloomy, windy day by the mountain tarn, set amid the rugged rocks, when the trout rose so freely, and the weight of his creel was almost more than he could bear on his homeward journey. Again he rambles through the feathery meadow-sweet and luxuriant grass, full of daisies and buttercups, by the side of a southern trout stream, and

sends the May-fly to yon eddy where the big trout lies. Once more he sees the salmon surging up stream at the end of seventy yards of line, and his frantic bound out of the brown water. Once again he lies in dreamy contentment by the side of a lilled pool, and watches his float slide away with the bite of a carp, or duck briskly with the dash of a perch.

And his helpmate, if she be spirit of his spirit, as well as bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, will rejoice to see the wrinkles on his forehead grow smoother, the lines about his mouth relax from their sternness, and quiver with the play of a smile ; and as his eyes close she will know that he has fallen asleep on a mossy bank in a woodland glade, and that the murmur of family talk is to him the pleasant sound of a rippling stream by which he has been wandering, and the glare of the gas is transformed into the flicker of the sunshine through the fluttering oak leaves, or the glitter and reflex from the intermingling wavelets.

She is glad to see this, and she is not jealous of his love—that to him is second nature—for the angler's life and the angler's joys. She knows, too, cunning woman, that when he wakes from that refreshing dream and fancy, he will be amiably disposed to grant her her heart's desire, whether it be a new bonnet, or to take the children to the pantomime. Those for whom we chiefly write will know this is no fancy picture, and they will

know also that such reveries are refreshing alike to the mind and the body.

Too often, alas! the power of indulging in such reveries is wanting. The nerves are so keenly strung from the high pressure to which they have been subjected, that they cannot relax and rest even for a moment, and the brain has been so busy that it cannot throw off the habit of work. In such a case, involuntary reverie and thought such as we have described are impossible, and then, we who write, and many like us, we are glad to say, step in to the rescue, and present with friendly force to the rebellious brain the soothing medicine of a picture in words. This is our mission, to bring back to jaded hearts the time when—

The glad spring green grows luminous
With coming summer's golden glow,
And merry birds sing as they sang to us
In far-off seasons long ago.

Then away to the Linn with us, and hey for a merry day! and a breath of the freshest air, and a ramble by the bonniest burn-side in the North Country.

There is the Linn, and at first sight there is not much to see. A steep hill-side, thickly covered with heather, stretching up to the wild moorland above,

and broken into rocky ridges, is cleft by a deep ravine, which appears to be filled to overflowing with trees and shrubs. From the foot of the ravine and out of the dense underwood, a stream steals rapidly away like a fox from a covert when the hounds enter. This is the Linn. You had better put your rod together outside, for there is not over-much space inside, and it is often a difficult matter to put it together where the trees grow close, and the top joint will catch in the branches.

It may seem a strange kind of day that we have selected for an angling ramble. There are many fishers who would laugh us to scorn for sallying out with a rod this day, for it is a brilliant, blazing summer's day, and the water in the burn is as clear as crystal. "No trout would look at a fly on such a day." No, friend, but they will look at a clean red worm if it be handled as we mean to handle it. We intend to catch a fair quantity of trout, clear as the water is and cloudless the sky. Therefore, if you would learn a wrinkle, look at our tackle. Our rod is short and rather stiff, not made for throwing a fly, but excellently adapted for pitching a worm into a far-away eddy between rocks and roots, and the very thing for holding a fish by the head without giving him an inch of line, in places—and there are many such in the Linn—where to give a fish line

would be to lose him. At the end of our line are six feet of fine gut, the last few links of gut so fine that it is no thicker than horsehair. The hook is of extremely fine and beautiful steel, and sharper than any needle. Were the water a little darker we should use the Stewart tackle, which, as an "all round" worm tackle, is better than any other. It is made of three small hooks, tied on the gut at intervals of half-an-inch, and facing opposite ways. To bait this, each hook is passed right through the worm laterally, so that it hangs in loops between them. The worm hangs in such a tempting way that the trout takes no notice whatever of the hooks, and with this tackle he is hooked at once, and there is no delusive nibbling. In all streams we consider this to be the best worm tackle, except when the water is so supernaturally bright and clear as it is to-day. Now, our single hook of excessive fineness is the best. Our worms are small, and of a clear red, betokening that they have been well scoured on moss.

Now we enter the Linn, and ere we have gone a hundred yards its exceeding beauty grows upon us. To say that it is indescribable would imply that it is a folly to attempt to describe it, but as the very object of our article is to describe the Linn, that "the old place may bring the old time back," we will not say that it is indescribable, and we will select a pen made

of the quill of a wild goose, shot in its upper portion, to aid us in our task.

We have said that the Linn was a deep ravine, through which there flowed a brawling burn. At its entrance we passed into a larch wood, where the air was laden with a sweet resinous odour, and the light was mellowed by the "tender living light," the pure and perfect green, the delicate shining emerald of the fresh larch foliage. In the early spring every one of these larches hangs out a brave show of buds of the palest, lightest green, just like the spray of a fountain, so ethereal do they look quivering in the sunlight; but now the green is fuller and deeper, but yet none the less bright and fresh. Underfoot there is little vegetation, but the foot sinks deep in a brown coating of fir-needles. Down on the left the brook brawls and sparkles, sending quivering shafts of light up to us from its myriad reflecting surfaces. A green wood-pecker stiffens its tail against the bark of a tree, and taps violently and resoundingly against the wood, and then we can see the long narrow tongue shooting out and in, picking off the insects disturbed by his "tapping at the door."

Out of the larch wood we reach the wilder part of the ravine. A rude path leads by the stream, and crosses it every now and then by means of a rude and picturesque wooden bridge. On the other side

the rocks rise in craggy ledges, cracked and seamed and furrowed as if nature had done her utmost to rive the hill asunder in some fierce throe of agony. Dwarf oaks grow wherever there is a crevice large enough to hold their roots; the rowan trees strew their foliage of airiest lightness, and here and there the "lady of the forest," the "silver birch," rears its graceful form—its white and shining stem a fair contrast to the rugged rocks, and its drooping tresses to the sturdy oaks. The underwood is thick and luxuriant. Tall brackens rise boldly up through interlacing brambles, and between the path and the burn, is a fringe of hazels into which a squirrel has unwisely retreated, and in his haste to escape from us executes wonderful feats among the too pliant branches. The bed of the brook is wide, as becomes a mountain brook which, after heavy rain, is a raging torrent; but at present the water twists and turns around boulders of every size, and every hundred paces, pours down in silvery cataracts over high ledges of rocks into deep, bubbling pools below. These rocks and boulders are piled and strewn in the wildest confusion. Every now and then the stream disappears, to reappear welling from beneath some cavernous rock. Here the brook is divided into a score of channels—like black snakes writhing in shining folds; and there it gathers in a deep frothing pool, underneath a forest of broad, cool, harts-

tongue ferns, and washes the long, brown moss lazily up the slippery rock.

We select a pool to commence with, and, lying down on a slab of rock, we peer into it. Half-a-dozen trout are visible in the clear water, with their heads up stream, and they are as yet unsuspicious of our presence. With a twitch of the wrist we jerk our worm against the upper rock, and it falls naturally on to the fringe of moss, and is washed off into deep water by the ripple. There! we have hooked a trout; he went at it furiously, and now he is in our basket. The rest have disappeared under the stones, and we pass on to the next pool. There! that is the way to catch them. Keep well out of sight; throw in at the top of the pool, and let the worm float downward, and that it may float the more naturally, you should have no shot on your line; and the hotter and brighter the weather is, the more trout you will catch, unless rain should be imminent, when your chance of sport will be very small indeed. You will only catch one in each pool though, so pass on, and, to fish that next pool, crouch on your hands and knees behind that boulder, and cast at a venture into the still, deep water above, not allowing so much as the point of your rod to appear above it, for the trout seem floating in air, so clear is the stream.

Is not every yard of ground a perfect study? Look

at that large, sloping rock above you. On it grow the greenest mosses, glossy hartstongue ferns, the black maidenhair spleenwort, and the graceful green spleenwort. Its broad surface is stained with many shades of grey, brown, and green, and just at its foot a clump of forget-me-nots laughs at us with its blue eyes. At the summit a monster lady-fern waves its handsome fronds in the light summer breeze, while down one side of it the water slides in a black current, broken into silver by opposing points of rock, and at the foot of the waterfall, on a projecting spur, sits a white-breasted water-ouzel, flipping its tail, and singing its robin-like song.

To-day we have little difficulty in picking up a trout from each likely pool, and so we scramble on over the uneven ground, getting used to the murmur of the water, so that it becomes a silence in which we can hear the hum of that cloud of gnats, golden in the sun-light, which quivers above us.

And now the ravine grows narrower, and its sides higher and more precipitous. The brambles and the thorns are fewer, but the ferns are doubly luxuriant. Every crest and coign of vantage is crowded with lady-ferns, and some on the edge of the rock, which, from some cause or other, have met with a premature death, hang over in clustered tresses of golden brown. The shield-ferns vie with the lady-ferns in luxuriance, but

not in beauty, and the common bracken now gives place to his nobler congeners. Then, with a sudden transition from the wildness and the tropical luxuriance of the ferns, we come upon a meadowy interspace, margined with oaks, and flecked with sunshine and shadow, sleeping quietly in a sunny haze and silence. Across this there runs a tiny tributary stream, scarce six inches wide in parts, but every few yards falling over a stone into a little pool—a pool not much larger and deeper than a good-sized saucepan. Yet watch. We drop our worm on the top of a puny waterfall, and as it is carried souse into the pool below, a troutlet darts at it from under the bank, and is hooked. Each pool seems to hold just one trout, about six inches long, and if one is caught its place is supplied a day or two afterwards. In the space of twenty yards we catch four small trout in this manner, and each in his own little pool, where hitherto he was monarch of all he surveyed.

Beyond the glade the ravine becomes still narrower, the rocks become barer, but are painted with stripes of brilliant green, where runlets of water trickle over cushiony moss. The waterfalls increase in height and grandeur, and the water is always white with foam and sparkling with air-bells, each of which seems to hold captive a bit of a sunbeam. We become sensible of a louder roar, and then we come to the end of the Linn, and its crowning beauty bursts upon us. Far above our

heads tower the overhanging rocks, the foliage of the trees on either side intermingling in the middle. From a height of fifty feet the burn flings itself over the rock in a splendid cascade, and plunges with a sullen roar into the boiling caldron beneath. From thence it slips away between two huge fern-crowned boulders, to be again hurled over a smaller fall, over which a slender plank and handrail serve as a bridge. Seated on a rude seat we watch the foaming water, and seem to lose our individuality in its overpowering *ego sum*.

Hark ! what is that bell-like note which has sounded more than once down the stream ? It is like the cry of an otter-hound. Ah, there is no mistake about that splendid crash of music. It is a pack of hounds hunting an otter, and every hound is joining in the mellow chorus, which is answered in sharp and quick excitement by the rocks around. A dark object bounds over that rock into the pool above. It is the otter, and a fine fellow he is. With sinewy and cat-like steps it advances towards us, and, seeing us, stands irresolute for a moment, glaring savagely. Hunted to death ! Poor beast ! we cannot help feeling some pity for it. There can be no escape now. A sheer wall of rock before and a baying pack behind. Now the hounds and men appear on the scene, toiling and panting. The otter plunges boldly into the pool below the great fall. The downpour of water catches it, and whirls it over and

over, driving it pitilessly from its last hope—that dark hole in the rock behind the fall. As it rises exhausted on the verge of the pool, the hounds are upon it, and, after a short, brave struggle for life, the otter is killed and the hunt is over. The echoing shouts of the men and the belling of the hounds die away from the crags, and the silence of death hangs over the beautiful Linn.

We loiter slowly homewards, enjoying the pleasant time, and knowing that, although our ramble is ended, “the tender grace of a day that is dead” will abide with us while life lasts.

AN ANGLER'S HOLIDAY.

I.—HOME.

IF the reader will but agree with us in certain premises, we shall feel much more comfortable in our mind with regard to his opinion of our book. First, then, is it not true that the fiercer and intenser a pleasure is, the sooner does it "sate its novel force," the more quickly are we tired of it, and the less wishful are we for its repetition? This much granted, it follows that our quieter pleasures give a greater sum of pleasure on the whole, and a more healthy relief from the labour of life. Then, there are undoubtedly two kinds of pleasure, one which ends as it begins—a pleasure alone; and the other which rests and recreates—gives health and energy, and in its effects is almost never-ending. As an example of the former class, we would instance the pleasure we derive from the perusal of a book, the listening to an opera, or the social gathering; as the

best instance of the latter, the quiet idyllic interest of country life, and the pursuits of the angler and the naturalist. If you agree with us thus far, we are quite satisfied, and we are content to prose on about the poetry of the woods and fields, the lakes and streams, just as a grand-dad talks of the feats of his youth, or the lover prates of the charms of his mistress.

Confession is good for the soul, they say, and at the risk of drawing down upon our heads some strong indignation, we must confess that our earliest love was for that which some people call nature; but as that term has become somewhat hackneyed and indefinite in meaning, we prefer to call it *the out-of-doors*. We never took well to confinement. During our school-life the blue sky seen through the barred windows, and the pigeons or the rooks which circled under it, or the top branches of the chestnuts tossing in the wind, were more frequently our objects of contemplation than the pages of our books. The unrest and the longing, which was never satisfied save in the open air, by the glancing stream or on the far-seeing hill-top, have followed us through life; and though through the dull winter those feelings may be dormant, yet as the fair spring grows into fairer summer, they arise with a power not to be controlled, and away *out of doors* we must go, and be once more blest in the possession of that which contenteth us.

There are certain pleasant spots in England which, from their own natural beauty and the associations which boyish romance and youthful friendships have endowed them with, have such a charm that when a holiday-time comes round each year, we are constrained to revisit them, and put off for yet another year the pilgrimage to fresh fields and pastures new which in the winter time we have planned. As the race for pelf grows swifter, the time for a holiday is more hardly snatched, and yet more keenly longed for. With us a habit has arisen of discussing on Sundays, at dessert, the manner in which the next vacation shall be spent. It is pleasant to talk so, although the fulfilment of these plans falls far short, as a rule, of their conception. Whatever we plan, though, as the time for starting grows near, we feel that mere rest is the great desideratum, and so we dive at once into the stillness and fragrance of a quiet, restful, country holiday. What it is like we will try to show you, if you will only care to read.

June blazed forth her hottest, and then strove to quench her heat with many showers. After a fortnight's rain the glass became more settled, and it seemed to us that there was every prospect of some continued fair weather. So as July grew apace we resolved to visit the home we had not seen for a twelvemonth, ere the June roses had lost their glow. It was a long journey. Starting in the afternoon we

stayed the night at a manufacturing town, and then we started westward, through a country that steamed under a soft, warm rain, to the pleasant house that nestled where the border hills of Wales curtsied to the rich Shropshire plain. After the dwarf vegetation and hard-looking woods of the north, it was delicious to see the fat, green hedges panting under their load of glistening rain-drops, the luxuriant grass fields, and the massy woodlands. There was a sense of plenty and cheerfulness that was very suggestive. Then the hills rose blue and cloud-like; streams, lakes, woods, and farmhouses became well-remembered landmarks. At the stations were faces that were familiar to us even though their owners' names had escaped us. More real and pleasant grew our thoughts

Of deep shadows on the grass,
Of meadows where we saw the cattle graze;
Where, as the breezes pass,
The gleaming rushes bend a thousand ways;
Of leaves that slumber in a cloudy mass
Or whiten in the wind; of waters blue
That from the distance sparkle through
Some woodland gap; and of a sky above,
Where one white cloud like a stray lamb doth move.

Yonder the silver sheet of the mere—well-remembered and much-loved—shone like another sun midst the bowery woods, and there was a quiet gliding stream where many a grayling has fallen victim to our skill.

And there was the station where we were to alight, and the waggonette in waiting. In the centre of the platform was the Pater waiting for us: his tall, sturdy form stemming the hurrying crowd of passengers as carelessly and easily as a boulder in a stream. Bless him! his welcome of his "boy" is a keen one. We will sketch his portrait by-and-by.

We drove through the country lanes towards Rosebower as the rain-clouds lifted, and the sun, peeping saucily from behind his mask, drew out the fragrance of a thousand flowers. In front of us were three tall poplars, bowing lazily and whitening creamily in the wind that had sprung up to play with the sun and chase the rain. These poplars were the landmark which showed the position of our home, but the lanes wound in and out so much that they were now this side and now that, and often behind us. One lane was deep and high hedged, so that we drove along through a leafy tunnel, and here the honeysuckle lingered yet in wonderful profusion, covering the hedges with masses of white and yellow, blush-pink and crimson, giving forth the sweetest and most grateful incense. We drew full breaths again and again with huge and childish delight, and great gratitude to the Giver of Good. There came into our minds a passage from a book which we always take with us into the country, "The Flowering Plants of Great Britain," by Anne Pratt,

which is so appreciative of the honeysuckle that we quote it :—

“When the honeysuckle first puts forth its leaves the landscape is looking dreary. The thorns, with bronzed stems, hang dripping with rain-drops ; the dark leaves of the dark-leaved privet glisten near the red twigs of the cornel ; while perchance some bough of the yellow osier seems like a golden rod, or some catkin of willow or hazel gives a little brightness to the scene. Brown leaves, with an occasional yellow spray, hang on the youngling oaks, and the rich crimson leaf or stem of the bramble winds among them. But the honeysuckle leaf has about it the hopes and associations of spring-time. It is the herald of thousands of green leaves, which shall quiver on the stem and resound to the pattering rain-drops of April, and be brightened by April rainbows. Its spray is to the foliage like the daisy to the flowers and the robin to the birds—the first, and therefore the fairest of its clan.”

Not less welcome than its leaves in the spring are the full ripe blossoms of its luxuriant summer dress.

Then we entered upon a heavily-timbered lawn, where the sleek, red cattle stood rejoicing in the damp coolness, scarce troubling themselves to move off the gravel path out of our way.

As the trees opened out, we came in sight of Roses-

bower, and well it deserved its name. Originally it had been an old farm-house, and it had been added to here and there by buildings of various styles of architecture, until it had assumed a delightfully quaint and rambling look. Along the two principal sides of the house ran a verandah, supported by wooden pillars, and along the top of the verandah and these pillars roses red, roses white, and roses yellow grew in the greatest profusion, and with the happiest effect of colour.

Near one part of the house a large wild cherry-tree grew on the shaven lawn, the red fruit trembling multitudinous among the leaves. On the left part of the house a lime-tree flung its sheltering branches over one end of the croquet-lawn, and to the right stretched the flower-gardens, resplendent in colour, and behind all were dark firs that hid the outbuildings beyond. It was a fair scene, but its greatest beauty was that it was home.

The home of one's childhood has a sacred charm about it that is never wholly effaced, even by the comforts of the new home a man forms when he marries and settles down. Happy are they who have thus two homes, and both of them pleasant ones ; and pleasant is the time when the offshoot can spare its tenants for a visit to the older home.

There in the doorway stood the mother, her hands quivering with the tenderness of the welcome she had

ready for her first-born, who to her was a boy still, notwithstanding he had married a wife and had a household of his own. Father, mother, brothers, sisters, well it is when nothing occurs during the many months of absence, and through the hurry of the selfish turmoil of increasing cares, to mar your loving welcome, or dim your fond and admiring glances with aught but the mist of glad tearlets. Well may a man strive his utmost to deserve the pride you feel in him and his achievements.

Well, we were at home, and maternal solicitude suggested something to eat, and a most prolonged and charming lunch it was, with much gossip and laughter, while the rain-drops fell from the eaves on to the carpet of rose-petals, which the showers had scattered on the lawn, and the scent of *Gloire de Dijon* and Marshal Niel tickled our nostrils gratefully.

Then we wandered out and about, despite of the wet under foot, visiting and making friends with the cattle, the horses, and the dogs, and pacing the garden walks, duly admiring the gardener's *chefs-d'œuvre*, startling the cushat from the ivied tree at the end of the kitchen-garden ; getting wet through with the sudden showers ; changing twice and getting a mighty appetite for dinner ; and afterwards enjoying a cosy chat in the Pater's sanctum, a room that opened with glass doors on to the verandah. So we looked out westward over the undulating meadows and copses to the blue border hills that

now stood out sharp and clear, and then receded and were blurred with a yellow curtain of rain. The purple rain-clouds grew ragged and golden at the edges, the gloaming crept up from the weather-gleam, and the night fell peaceful and soundless, save for the recurrent grating cry of a corncrake in the long grass of the hay-field, and the scream of the whirling swifts.

II.—UP WITH THE LARK.

THE window of our bedroom was left open, and the cool night air, fresh from the rain-wet woods, filled the chamber, so that our sleep was healthy, and therefore dreamless and light. At four o'clock the next morning we were broad awake, and looking out westward over the fair country. The fields were silver-grey with innumerable rain-drops, but the clouds had gone away to the northward, and a grey-blue sky and hazy weather-gleam foretold the coming of a hot day. The breeze came in gentle puffs, bringing to one's nostrils the fragrance of the roses, and the heavier and richer odour of the meadow-sweet, which, in the meadow yonder, shook its cream-white clusters over the ripening hay.

The sparrows twittered and chirruped with great industry on the eaves, and the starlings preened themselves on the dovecote.

About two hundred yards from the house was a pool, small in size and shallow, but full of carp, which were at all times most difficult to catch. One side of the pool was bounded by the lane, and on the other was a field containing a savage white bull, the terror of all trespassing anglers. All day long the country urchins sat on the lane side of the pool and fished for small carp of two or three inches in length, and their persistent efforts effectually frightened the bigger fish, so that none could be caught on ordinary occasions. The previous evening, a younger brother named Herbert, a lad of seventeen, had arranged with us that we should try for them early in the morning, and hence it was that we dressed hastily and "anyhow" (oh, the delight of being able to dress "anyhow!"), and left our room with the intention of waking Herbert. Our quarters were in a portion of the house separated from the rest of the house by a distinct staircase and doors, and when past these, we had no clear idea where his room lay. So we went prospecting, creeping stealthily with stockinged feet, lest we should rouse the house, and yet it seemed to us that every oaken plank we stepped upon had a loud and distinctive creak. Listening at one door we heard a dual sound of

breathing ; at another, there was no sound at all. While standing uncertain, a third door opened, and out came Master Herbert, ready for the fray. Our first visit was to the larder, for it is a golden rule never to commence the day upon an empty stomach.

We were soon at the pool, on the surface of which thin wisps and veils of mist still slumbered. A heron stood in the marginal weeds, and was so incredulous of visitors so early, that he blinked and blinked his sleepy eyes at us in wonder, and only arose when we were within ten yards of him. Our hooks were baited with red worms, and our lines were dropped quietly into the water, supported by the tiniest floats. While we waited and watched for the first bite, we drew in huge draughts of the exhilarating morning air, with an additional zest, because we knew that the day would turn out scorching hot. All around was very quiet and still, and we noticed what a different nature characterises the stillness of the morning and that of the night. In both, the silence is equally profound away from the houses ; but while at night the quiet is in accordance with the dying day and the darkness, in the morning it is in keen contrast with the quivering brightness, the intoxicating freshness, and the vigour which impels to action.

A float moves a little, then dips slightly, and then lies still, as if no fish had touched the bait.

Patience! he is at it still. Now it slides away with quickening pace, and then dips under water, towards a tree root. Strike, and hold him by the head! Give him the butt, for he is in dangerous proximity to the sunken branches. Now lead him into the rushes. He is landed, a fine carp of two pounds weight.

So we went on, now one and then the other hooking a fish, until ten fine carp lay on the bank. The mists arose from the water, the pearls vanished from the meadow-grasses, the insect hum grew louder, and the thrushes sang in the poplars, the sky brightened into its clearest blue—and the fish ceased biting. It was seven o'clock, and we had not done badly, yet, like Oliver, we asked for more and were admonished. The tiny sprats of carp commenced biting vigorously, and the frequent dips of our floats inspired us with delusive hopes. We had been fishing from the lane, but seeing that the bull was feeding quietly in a far corner of the field with his head turned away from us, we climbed over the gate and went on with our fishing. Presently we heard a tramp and a bellow, and lo! there was the bull close upon us and charging valiantly. One of us scrambled headlong over the gate, just in time to dispense with the bull's assistance, and the other, whose line was fast in a root at this inopportune moment, jumped waist-deep into the pool, and waded out at the other side. Our

fishing was at an end, and, laughing heartily, we gathered up our spoil and departed.

The Gipsy was still sleeping the sleep of the just, and when she was awakened she was very incredulous of our early rising, seeing that in the town we were always loath to get up in the mornings.

III.—THE PORTRAIT OF AN ANGLER.

UP and down the avenue of laurels, and under the shadow of the firs, where the blackbirds are chuckling and the doves are cooing, he walks. His hands are clasped behind him, and his head is bent in meditation while he awaits the summons to breakfast. He is tall and broad-shouldered, and he is gathering flesh, as becomes a man of his years. His broad, high forehead bespeaks intellect ; his mouth and chin have the impress of firmness, but in his eye there shine the kindness of heart and liberality of judgment which have made him valued as a friend, and sought for as a counsellor through the country-side. As an angler he is one whom old Izaak would have loved, for with him angling is an idyllic pastime, a contemplative man's recreation. He has no

care for the more exciting branches of the art. He cares but little for the toils of salmon-fishing, or the excitement of landing the savage pike. More to his taste, is the quiet ramble by the side of a trout-stream, the seat in a punt, gudgeon-fishing, or a still, calm evening by a pool-side, angling for tench. He himself would tell you that he is an angler because of the opportunities it affords for pleasant and profitable reverie.

‘ It was very little matter whether he caught fish or not when he went a-fishing. “ Atte the leest he hath his holsom walke, and merry at his ease, a swete ayre of the swete savoure of the meede floures that makyth him hungry ; he heareth the melodyous harmony of fowles ; he seeth the younge swaunes, heerons, ducks, cotes, and many other fowles and theyr brodes, whyche me seemyth better than all the noyse of hounds, the blaste of hornys, and the crye of fowlis that hunters, fawkeners, and fowlers can make. And if he take fysshe, surely there is then noe man merrier than he is in his spyryte.”

So the ramble in the country, its pleasant sights and sounds, the chance meeting with a friend of kindred tastes, and the conversations, rich and rare, into which those who know him well are irresistibly beguiled, make the days pass pleasantly and happily. There is a certain old-fashioned quaintness in his manner which he must

have caught from his favourite *Spectator*. His friends call him Sir Roger de Coverley, and the name is an apt description. Piscator says that "angling is somewhat like poetry—men are to be born so ; I mean with inclinations to it, though both may be heightened by discourse and practice ; but he that hopes to be a good angler must not only bring an inquiring and observing wit, but he must bring a large measure of hope and patience, and a love and propensity to the art itself ; but having once got and practised it, then doubt not but angling will prove to be so pleasant that it will prove to be, like virtue, a reward to itself."

From what we have observed, we doubt that the angler whose portrait we are sketching was born to the art ; we think he was rather led into its exercise by the delight he takes in its accessories ; therefore he is, as a rule, not a successful angler. His pursuit of the fish themselves is not keen enough for that, and he is too often led aside by some extraneous object. His float may be carried down, and the fish may entangle his line in the weeds, the while he is unconsciously peering at the petals of a flower through a magnifying-glass. His rod may lie on the bank of a stream while the minnows are nibbling the feather off his flies, and he will be absorbed in the study of gravel sections or rock strata laid bare by the winter torrents. When he returns to angling consciousness, he will extricate his

line from the weeds or put fresh flies upon his line, with a quiet smile and without the least impatience.

While, however, his fishing excursions bear but little immediate fruit, the ultimate result of them and his quiet meditations are many steps in the world of science, and clear, intelligent articles in the *Quarterlies*.

The laurel avenue is his favourite walk in leisure hours. At his heels sedately trots an old retriever; the sparrows scarce trouble themselves to get out of his way, and a white cat springs upon his broad shoulders from an overhanging bough, and sits there in triumph as he continues his walk.

"God never did make a more calm, quiet, innocent recreation than angling," and surely he never made a better angler and man than he who now obeys the sound of the breakfast-bell.

IV.—ON A COTTAGE DOOR.

WE will wager a pot of honey to a strawberry that you never fished off a cottage door. Three of us did so one day, and this is the way of it:—

We had planned an expedition to a pool which will be no stranger to those whom we may number among

our unseen friends. It is a pool on the summit of a Welsh hill, and full of carp. The weather was so hot for several days, that we could not think of going there, for we knew that the carp would not bite. So we waited patiently ; and, in the meantime, we fished up an old eel-spear, and went eel-spearing in the canal, with very fair success ; or fly-fished for roach in the evenings, in a slowly-moving stream which ran through the meadows about a mile from the house. Then we wandered about the lanes and the woods, and gathered wild flowers, and dried and pressed them, until the multitude of those which demanded attention, from their extreme beauty or singularity, increased so that we grew confused, and eventually gave up their individual study, and admired them in the concrete. Very pleasant pictures were afforded by those broad and shady lanes. Many portions were grassy all across ; all had luxuriant tangles of brambles, ferns, grasses, and flowers, over which butterflies flitted on brilliant wings. They were bordered with tall thistles, swaying under the clinging, seed-eating goldfinches ; briars, where the yellowhammer sunned his golden coat ; foxgloves, whose red-purple bells bent 'neath the weight of a big bumble-bee ; dark beds of nettles, from whose uninviting depths that handsome butterfly, the red-admiral, rose, hour-old from the chrysalis, and flashed his scarlet bands in the face of the dull "meadow-brown;" clumps of wild geraniums, purple

and red, nodding and bowing to feathery grasses ; and clusters of meadow-sweet, white and intangible as summer cloudlets, and lading the hot air with a cloying fragrance. Then there were such magnificent hedges : slender hazel rods, thickets of bronzed thorn, glossy-green hollies, and tangling briony, all so full of bird-life that the Gipsy, who had led a town life, was astounded. Criticising, once, a book we had written for boys, she had said : " They find birds' nests and butterflies so pat—just as if they had been placed ready for them to find. It is not likely or natural." To which we had replied : " A country boy who has his wits about him, and has a taste for natural history, knows exactly where to look for what he wants, and will, in all probability, find it ; so that there is nothing wonderful about it." But she was still incredulous, and accused us of drawing the long bow. Now we had our revenge ! After a preliminary investigation of the neighbourhood, we led her out of doors, and commenced, first of all, with the verandah itself. In the roses, round the first supporting pillar, was a wren's nest, from which the young ones had flown ; on the next was a flycatcher's, with eggs in—a second laying ; on the third was another flycatcher's, with young ones in ; on the fourth, a chaffinch's ; on the fifth, a sparrow's ; on the sixth, another flycatcher's, and so on, nearly every pillar bearing a nest. The shrubs in the garden and orchard were

similarly tenanted. Thrushes' and black-birds' nests were very common. On a ledge of the orchard wall were five young flycatchers being fed by the parent birds, and an interesting sight it was. The old birds—graceful, grey creatures they are—flew each to its own post—one the top of a stake, and the other a spade standing in the ground near to a gooseberry bush—and, after turning its head quickly to this side and that, with eyes watchful and twinkling, would dart, swallow-like, at some insect ; often seizing it at the first dart, but sometimes twisting cleverly about for a few moments in pursuit ; then it would bear its prey to the row of fluttering winglets, and clamorous, wide-gaping mouths on the ledge. It was a busy and pretty sight, and the Gipsy dated her first liking for natural history from it.

In the stack-yard, which was thickly carpeted with the scarlet pimpernel, was a lark's nest between two stones, and a thrush's built on a cart-wheel, and, in a hole of the bank of the lane, was a robin's nest—whereby hangs a tale.

The eggs had all been taken except one, and the robin hatched that one, and the pair of old birds were very assiduous in their attentions to their only child. One day we found the nest gone ; and shortly afterwards passing that way, we saw one of the old birds lying in the hole left by the removal of the nest, dead.

The body was quite warm, and bore no marks of violence ; and the Gipsy said it had died of a broken heart, on the place where its home had been—and, i' faith, she may not have been far wrong.

The heat increased, and as the heat increased so did the flies, so that rambling about the lanes and through the woods became almost unbearable. Yet it was wrong to grumble, for the hay was ripening fast, and was nearly ready to cut, and the corn grew straight and high and strong in the ear, so that the fields were as level as the sea in a calm, and had as many lights and shadows, and opaline changes of colour, and soft flushes of sunset. The horizon narrowed and lay suffused in a blue shade ; the hills melted into indistinct outlines ; the colours of the landscape grew richer and deeper ; the hollows of the dark woods were lined with foxgloves, and the fresh green of June was gone for a twelvemonth longer.

Then men waded knee-deep in the grass, and cut long lanes for the reaping-machines to get to work. The cheery clatter of the machines, and the swish of the falling hay sounded over all the country-side. Men grew swarthy red in the fierce heat, and the harvest beer was issued out all day long in amazing quantities. We worked in the hay in the mornings with the men, racing with each other to turn over our lines of cocks the quickest. For the afternoons

we had rigged up a hammock under the limes, and there we swung and read, or dozed to the music made by—

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmur of innumerable bees

in the lime-trees overhead—trees which were full of sound as an Æolian harp, from the multitudinous insects which were attracted by their honey-wet leaves. And then

By night we lingered on the lawn,
For underfoot the herb was dry,
And genial warmth ; and o'er the sky
The silvery haze of summer drawn ;

And calm that let the tapers burn
Unwavering ; not a cricket chirr'd,
The brook alone far off was heard,
And on the board the fluttering urn :

And bats went round in fragrant skies,
And wheel'd or lit, the filmy shapes
That haunt the dusk, with ermine capes
And woolly breasts and beaded eyes ;

While now we sang old songs that pealed
From knoll to knoll, where, couched at ease,
The white kine glimmered, and the trees
Laid their dark arms about the field.

But what of the cottage door? Ah! well, we had forgotten all about it ; but it shall have another chapter all to itself.

V.—AMONG THE CARP.

THE heat grew sultry and oppressive; the men laboured mechanically in the hay-fields, the flycatchers which had been industriously foraging from their stations on the standard-roses, grew tired and quiet. A small black cloud came from over the Wrekin, the rounded crest of which stood out clear and sunny beneath it. Speedily the heavens were overcast, and a dark, eerie stillness reigned over the landscape. The forked lightning flashed whitely down to the earth, and redly back again to the clouds; the heavens opened, and a deluge of rain descended that drove us all indoors.

From the shelter of the verandah we watched the storm, which awed the most careless of us by its grandeur. The three tall poplars waved white against the gloomy canopy, and trembled under the pealing and crashing of the thunder. The rain beat savagely upon the 'plaining branches, and sprang up again in angry jets from the pools. The birds sat quailing in their nests, or skulked low down in the hedges. The flycatcher sitting on her nest in the verandah let us

touch her without moving; she was so fearful of the tempest that she seemed to be glad of our company and protection. Hay-making was suspended. The hay already cut had been gathered hastily into cocks, and would not take much harm, but it was feared that the wheat would be much beaten down by the weight of the rain.

When the fierceness of the tempest had passed away, a steady rain set in, hiding not only the hills, but the near woods in its "mournful fringe." At night it grew finer, and we ventured out on the lawn with a lantern to pick up the worms which we imagined would, after rain, be crawling about in great numbers. To our astonishment there were none; the heavy rain had apparently frightened them, so that they had sunk deeper in the earth; for while gentle rain will bring them out in great numbers, "heavy wet" does not agree with them, but drives them deeper in.

We were rather puzzled to know how we should obtain bait for the morrow, until we stumbled against an old box in which the gardener had stored some rich mould for his flower-pots. Upon emptying this we found great numbers of capital red-worms. To make assurance doubly sure, we got some gunpowder, and making a good big "devil," sallied forth and stormed a wasps' nest in an adjoining lane.

The morning broke with a bright blue sky, across

which the clouds were being rapidly driven by a strong breeze from the south-east. It was not the best of days for carp-fishing, but we started, driving to the town, and then stoutly facing the five-mile walk uphill to the pool. Over meadow, thorough brake, thorough briar, over streams, and up crags, we pushed our way, passing well-remembered spots which had known no change, and brought back to us scenes of our happy boyhood with startling clearness. The jay flew chattering through the woods as of old, the pheasant flustered, and the rabbit scuttled. On the same bank grew the same thick growth of *Blechnum* ferns, the redstart built in the same hole of the grey stone wall, and everything was so fresh and beautiful with the old freshness and beauty, that we began to believe that we also had not changed; and by the time we reached the lovely pool on the hill-top, we were prepared to enjoy ourselves with the old keenness, and it seemed just as if it were a Saturday half-holiday years ago.

There were three of us—the writer, his young brother Herbert, and one whom we will call the Senior—full of quips and cranks and merry jests, complaining loudly of the steepness and difficulty of the way, and stopping very often to gather the wild strawberries which grew in remarkable profusion all the way, peeping with timid blushes from their sheltering, half-concealing leaves. Herbert was but seventeen—a tall, pleasant

lad, clever and thoughtful beyond his years, and with a most mad propensity for punning; and the worst of it was, that his puns were so apt, and uttered with such quaint gravity, that one was compelled to laugh at them.

Before us lay the pool in its sheltered hollow, reed surrounded, with inner belts of rushes and the smooth water, horse-tail; its surface intersected with water-hens and coots, a heron in the shallows, and wild ducks playing on an iris-island. The very water was greenish in colour, and then it had a background of alders, and willows, and black fir-forest.

Our rods were soon together; but an unforeseen difficulty arose. The water of the pool was unusually high, and had flooded the belt of willows around, covering the few standing-places there ever had been. It was far too cold to wade, and it really seemed as if we could not get at the pool to fish it. At the only open space it was too shallow. At last we discovered a spot at the lee side of the pool, where, by breaking down the branches of the dwarf willows and placing a line of stepping-stones, we could just make room for one to stand. Even then there was not sufficient room to swing the rod backwards for a throw out, and the wind was so strong that it was difficult to throw in its teeth. Herbert had brought with him a salmon-rod, which had been given to him, and which he had never before used.

Knowing the usual difficulty of reaching out, he had wisely brought it with him, and he was able to commence fishing at once—his float lying twenty feet beyond ours, which reposed uncomfortably just outside the rushes. While we were debating what we should do, Herbert's float moved away through the dancing ripples with a most decisive bite. He struck, and the carp, firmly hooked, dashed out towards the centre of the pool, taking out line like a salmon, and making the splendid rod bend and spring delightfully. After taking out fully fifty yards of line, he allowed himself to be turned, and came zigzagging back with sullen resistance, until he was close into the rushes, and then he proceeded to dash backwards and forwards, catching up both our lines, which were still in the water, and getting them into a pretty tangle. Herbert played him very steadily, though he was much excited, and at last he led him up a sort of drain, and we closed in behind him and lifted him out—a splendid fish of six pounds in weight. Leaving Herbert to re-bait, we rushed about seeking some means of getting at the pool. Not far off was a small cottage, which, upon examination, we found to be uninhabited. The garden presented a sad appearance, currant and gooseberry bushes running wild, and the beds overgrown with weeds. The door of the cottage was open, and we conceived and put into execution a capital idea. We took the door off its

hinges, and collected a quantity of loose bricks. Transporting these to the pool, we speedily constructed a platform on which there was just room for the three of us to stand.

We had no lack of bites. Barely five minutes passed without one or other of us having a bite. The pool, in all probability, had not been fished for some years, and the carp were not shy. But we missed a great many. Our floats were necessarily very close together, as we were fishing in a small bay; and when the float began to slide away with the peculiar motion of the carp-bite, if we struck too soon we missed the fish to a certainty, and if we gave it the proper time it entangled us with our neighbours' lines, and spoilt the chance for a time. Herbert had the most bites, as his bait was the farthest out, and he caught the most fish. Then, whenever a fish was struck by one of us, the others had to "up stick" and away, to give room for the carp to dash about in, and to aid in their landing. It was excessively inconvenient, but excellent fun, and a very novel position. For a time we had very good sport, catching fish of two to four pounds in weight, but none so big as the first one. Then they ceased biting; and no wonder, for the bay had been thoroughly disturbed, and the writer began to speculate if he could not find fresh fields and pastures new. At the windward side of the pool it was far too shallow to

fish it from the bank, but a line of rickety posts and rails ran out into the pool, enclosing a space where the cattle were allowed to drink and bathe. As this part of the pool was sheltered from the wind by the trees and hillside, it was calm and smooth, and rippled only by the back fins of the huge carp sailing about. The writer thought he would scramble out upon these rails, and he proceeded to do so. As he went to the shore-end of the rails, he saw many large carp with their noses to the bank, in only six inches of water. They were grubbing away in the mud in search of food, but when he placed his bait at their very noses they took no notice of it, save to scurry away with a huge wave and upheaval of mud.

It was very ticklish work scrambling along the rotten rails, but at last he gained the farthest point, and there, with some two feet of water and some six feet of mud below him, he balanced himself on a rail an inch wide and fished for carp. Grave misgivings crossed his mind as to how he should land the fish when he hooked them; but he was spared the risk. Great carp of ten pounds weight came wallowing at his very feet, gasping and sucking with their round fleshy mouths, and turning away from the worm which was all but put down their very throats. It was very tantalising to see such big fellows utterly impervious to his blandishments, and he could not forbear striking at

one of them with the butt-end of his rod, seriously endangering thereby his seat upon the rail. Not a bite did he get. He was out of the wind, and the sun blazed hotly upon his back. The rail was *cutting*, very; and he saw that his companions were again catching fish. So he crept back again and rejoined them.

During another lull in the biting we came off our platform to get some lunch and stretch our legs a little, laying our rods down to fish for themselves, Herbert being told off to keep an eye upon them. Suddenly he rushed forward exclaiming, "I have a bite!" and we watched him take up his rod and play a large fish. While he was doing so another float had disappeared without our knowledge, and a "scurr" of a reel and a splash in the water told us that a rod had disappeared into the pool. It dived clean out of sight, and the first we saw of it again was its top bobbing up full sixty yards out. The reel kept the butt-end under, and the top just emerged now and then as the fish ceased to pull for an instant. It was our rod—plague upon the pronouns!—not the plural "our," but the singular "our" of the author (if we use "I," we may be accused of egotism); so "we," not wishing to lose a valuable rod, rapidly undressed and plunged into the pool. We swam after the rod, and, after following it full a hundred and fifty yards, we lost sight of it. Just then the butt-end struck against our legs,

and, diving down, we seized it. There were quite forty yards of line out, and the fish was still on. Now commenced a most exciting struggle. Holding the rod in the one hand we swam with the other, and, not without some trouble we landed ourselves, and eventually the fish, which was three pounds in weight.

A goodly heap of fish lay side by side upon the grass—seventeen in number, and all good-sized ones. There were quite as many as we could carry, so we left off fishing and rambled about gathering wild strawberries, chasing conies, seeking for young wood-pigeons wherewith to make a pie, and generally behaving ourselves in a very silly, boyish, yet happy way. In truth, the youngest of us was by far the sedatest, and looked down with calm superiority upon our elderly frolics.

A great part of the wood had been cut down since the old times, so that we could see away over a forest of foxglove to the wild Welsh hills. Silent and still they lay in the swift-chasing sunshine and shadow. Their lower sides were green with irregularly mapped-out fields, and dotted with lonely farm-houses, from which the smoke crept lazily upwards, or whirled downwards before a sudden gust of wind. The sheep were so distant and small that their motions were not observable, and they gave no life to the view, so that far as the eye could see all was still and lonely. A

tiny village, clustered round an ancient church, seemed at that distance dead and deserted.

The hill-tops arrested the flying clouds that broke against them, and streamed up the glens, like rivers with an upward current. The rounded outlines of the nearer hills changed in the distance to the bluff crags and bold projections of the Snowdon mountains. Over the valley the raven floated from his nest on the inaccessible cliff, and his shadow fell on the sunny fields below. The ordered confusion, the solidity and the grandeur of the many hills, and the loveliness of their intersecting glens, spoke of half-savage wildness and half-barbaric freedom; yet the denizens of those sequestered farms held themselves but as serfs in bondage to a rich landowner. They claimed the independence of the Cymri, yet bowed down slavishly to the will of their landlord—and why? Because they must live, and poverty falls with the snow in these wild, hill villages, and springs up with the stones in their ploughed fields—and as poverty teaches so do they learn. So that, to him who looks under the surface, the fair freshness of the hill country is too often but a painful foil to the foul social and moral death beneath.

We had but to turn around, and there before us for mile on mile, stretched the greater portion of four fine counties: rich plains, massy woods, silver winding streams, and landmark hills such as the Wrekin, the

Breidden, Hawkstone, Longmynd, and others. There peace and plenty reigned, and comfortable homesteads, with well-filled stackyards, spoke to the gold that came from the bosom of the earth.

Around us the wind sighed loudly in the fir-trees, and the ripples washed among the reeds. There was no sound of man or domestic animal—nothing save our own voices, and the croak of the coots, and cackle of wild ducks, and noises in the wood which were hard to assign to their natural causes. When the excitement of the sport was over the place seemed uncanny, and presently we divided our spoil into three bundles and started homewards. We were heavily laden, and long ere the five miles were passed, we were thoroughly fagged. The waggonette was waiting for us, and the Gipsy was there too. "So you have caught some fish at last!" she cried; "I am glad to see that you *can* catch them sometimes." She is very incredulous, is the Gipsy, about our piscatory feats.

VI.—KITTEN - FISHING.

"LITTLE things please little minds" is a proverb which will perhaps explain the present doings of three boy-men who are sitting under the verandah. Possibly, also, the hot sun has turned their brains.

A few days ago we were all passing through the farmyard, when Herbert ran in advance of us into a building, and presently out of the holes in one of those diamond-shaped places in the wall, where alternate bricks are left out for the purpose of ventilation, there peeped the heads of six kittens, gazing inquisitively down upon us. The Gipsy uttered a cry of delight, and very soon had gathered all six of them in the folds of her dress. They were very pretty little kittens: one a pure white with one spot, which was named "Spot;" two of a goldy-brown, which were always mistaken for each other, and were collectively named "Bronze;" a tabby, a black, and a grey one of great beauty, called "Chin," from its likeness to chinchilla fur. They were intended to be brought up about the farm-buildings to keep down the mice, and they had never been in the house. The Gipsy took

them under her especial care while she remained at Rosesbower, and the consequence was that they were always in the house, curled up on the chairs one wished to sit down upon, or chasing the croquet-balls, or climbing up the standard-roses trying to catch the fly-catchers. The grey one was the Gipsy's especial favourite, and Herbert got into her black books because he, one day, floured it all over, and took it to her as a new kitten, and she began to pet it, and did not discover the deception until her hands and dress were all over flour.

Now, as we (the singular) lie in the hammock studying (well, reading a novel!), the six kittens are all on the lawn, wild for play, and there are three men with fishing-rods on the verandah, and to the ends of their lines are tied corks; and with these corks they are angling for the kittens, which seize the bait, and tug away at it, and run out line most bravely. Nor do they let go until they are dragged in to the very feet of the anglers. It is a very fair imitation of fishing, and it has this advantage—that the anglers like it as well as the kittens. The Gipsy is present, and is looking very doubtfully at the sport. She thinks it hurts the kittens' teeth, and is half disposed to interfere.

Dear me! this is very pleasant. A light wind has set the hammock a-swinging, the bees hum drowsily in the limes, and——ah, yes; we are not sleepy, but

it is pleasant to close the eyes—the translucent green of the leaves above us, and the flicker of the sunlight through them is rather dazzling.

“You’ve been asleep for an hour, and the dinner-bell is ringing.”

“Eh! what? Impossible! Who put all the kittens in the hammock? There is one asleep across our throat. We were in fairyland, but

A touch, a kiss—the charm was snapt,
There rose a noise of striking clocks,
And feet that ran, and doors that clapt,
And barking dogs, and crowing cocks.

You call us from the shades Elysian to the clang of the dinner-bell and a smell of roast mutton. Shame upon you!”

VII.—THE MERES.

WE made two excursions to the Mere district, at Ellesmere. For the enlightenment of those who are not acquainted with this lovely district, we may mention that in the north of Shropshire, in a prettily undulating and well-wooded country, are seven lakes, or meres, of various

sizes. The largest is at Ellesmere, and gives its name to a very quiet and sleepy town on its banks. It is about 120 acres in extent, and although it is a good deal fished, yet it still abounds in all kind of fish that love still waters. In our younger days the Meres were our favourite places of resort. In no other place was there so much natural history to be done, so many interesting facts to be observed, and so much sport to be had. We boated on their waters ; we caught large pike and perch out of their weedy depths ; and in their tall marginal reeds the reedwren built its purse-like nest, the coot and the wild-duck bred there ; and the untidy, soaking-wet nests of the great-crested grebe were not uncommon. Over the adjoining woods the osprey and peregrine had been known to seek their prey ; the woodpecker and the wryneck, the sparrow-hawk, the kestrel, and the jay all nested in the old trees, and the keepers were indulgent to well-behaved boys—such as, of course, we were. Hence our visits to the Meres were very frequent ; and whether we floated on their stilly bosoms on hot summer days, or skated around their margins, watching the tracks of wild creatures on the snow, we always came away having learnt something fresh and reaped some new enjoyment.

Hence a holiday in their neighbourhood could not be spent without again visiting them, for the sake of Auldlang-syne. We wished, too, to show the Gipsy the

pleasant haunts of our boyhood, of which she had so often heard us speak. So one day we drove her there. We halted on the top of a hill called the Brow, to show her the fairest view she yet had seen. We were on the highest corn-growing land in England, and it was a "far view" that unfolded itself to our gaze. The fair English plain; the bold bluffs of the Wrekin, the Briedden, and the Caradocs; the fringe of Welsh hills; the sheets of water shining out of the hearts of the woods showed themselves to the best advantage on that still, summer day. Then we drove down a steep descent, and entered the old-fashioned little town, which looked as if neither it nor its inhabitants had hurried themselves for many a century.

Encircled by woods, the lake lay calm and glassy, and the swans "floated double, swan and shadow." There was not a quiver on the broad surface of the lake, save that caused by the prow of our boat, as we rudely broke into the calm. The Gipsy was enchanted, and we were satisfied with the impressions our beloved Mere had produced.

We tried fishing, but with the *extraordinary* ill luck that *always* accompanies us whenever we take the Gipsy to watch us fishing, we had no sport, a perch of six inches long being our only capture. The carp we had caught a day or two before had nearly re-established our lost reputation as an angler; but the failure this

time, lost us that which we gained by the carp, and the Gipsy spoke most contemptuously of our capabilities. We said it was too hot and still. She replied that we had last told her as an excuse, that the day had been too cold and rough. So we were silenced.

At our next visit we were more fortunate. Three of us went, all of the male sex, and for convenience we will distinguish ourselves as Piscator, Viator, and Herbert. A sailing-boat was placed at our disposal, and as we embarked and proceeded to set the canvas, we feared there would be no wind ; but soon across the Mere there shot a broad line of light, and we knew that its surface was there gently rippled by a shaft of wind that came down between the gap in yonder wood. Then, as we cast adrift from the buoy, the surface of the water around us was turned into curling ripples, as the first indications of the breeze caught the floating particles and whisked them about, the sails filled, and ere long we were curtsying to a nice breeze, and the Mere seemed to contract in size as it was covered with dancing wavelets. Viator steered, Herbert managed the sheets, and Piscator put his pike-rod together, and mounted one of those American kill-devils—spoon-baits, painted red one side, and with a tuft of red wool dangling behind. Such baits are quite as killing as the natural bait on Ellesmere, provided there is a good breeze. Piscator let some thirty yards of line run out astern, and then the bait trailed astern ;

Viator letting the wind slide out of the sails, to prevent our going too fast.

"I say," said Viator, "what are we to do if you hook a big pike?"

"Bring the boat up into the wind as soon as you can," replied Piscator, raising his rod so that the bait might spin close to the top as we were passing over the weeds.

We dodged in and out of the islands, and admired the grand old church on its wooded hill, sailed past the Oatley woods, which resounded with the busy tapping of a woodpecker, past the terraces of the Hall gardens, by the park where the drinking deer stared at us large-eyed, and a large stoat was busy hunting up the rabbit burrows, and then we came to a place where the weed—that pest, the anacharis—came to within a foot of the surface.

"Haul in your sheet!" cried Piscator, "and take us quickly over this part." Viator obeyed, and we skimmed quickly over the green tresses of weed that undulated beneath our keel. We could see the spoon-bait spinning and glittering about six inches below the surface, and every now and then jumping out with a noisy skip. Just before we came to where the boat-houses peep from the shelter of the giant trees, the boat passed over a clear space between the weeds, and immediately there was such a rush and splash in the water as startled

us considerably. We could see the mottled flank of a goodly pike as he seized the spoon in his jaws, and turned again into the weeds, which parted hastily before him.

“Let her luff!” shouted Piscator. We were going before the wind, and going at a good pace, but Viator put the helm hard over, and, hauling in the sheet at the same time, he brought the boat into the eye of the wind with astonishing quickness, and at the very imminent risk of a capsize. Then Piscator found himself in a queer position. He was amidships, the pike was well forward of the bows, and the line was rasping against the taut luff of the foresail. He rushed forward into the bows, and, holding on by the jib as well as he could, he played his fish very skilfully, considering that he had two motions to fight against—that of the pike, which poked hither and thither among the weeds, masses of which hampered the line, and threatened to break either it or the rod; and the motion of the boat, which refused to “lie to,” and was kept working about in a series of short, uneasy tacks, now heading over the line and then shooting away from it, so that Piscator was kept constantly reeling in or letting out line. It was important that he should keep a taut line, that it might cut through the weeds and not “bag” under them, in which latter case he would infallibly lose his fish. At last he was in despair, and

said—"Hang it all, I will jump overboard; it can't be more than shoulder deep, and I can then play him properly." Herbert sounded with an oar, and found it was more than seven feet deep, so that idea was abandoned. Just then the pike came wallowing to the surface dead beat, with gaping jaws and glaring eyes. Viator steered right up to him, and Herbert caught him by the gills and hauled him on board. It was a well-fed fish of eight pounds in weight, which is a good weight for Ellesmere.

Piscator and Herbert insisted upon getting a small boat, and rowing round the Mere again and again, hoping to catch more pike. Five times the rod bent with the sudden rush of a fish, but three only were boated. The others broke away. Those that were caught were three, four, and five pounds in weight respectively.

Viator preferred sailing about alone, although the boat was rather large for him to manage. He coasted the beds of white and yellow water-lilies, whose large leaves heaved uneasily, as the ripples raised by the breeze caught them at a disadvantage.

Presently the wind dropped, and the pike left off running. Viator was becalmed in the middle of the Mere, as "idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean." The others joined him, and then we all bathed, diving in off the boat's side with great ease, but clambering

back again with infinite difficulty. Then came dinner at the "Red Lion," and as the landlord was accustomed to anglers' appetites, we were not ashamed of ourselves.

After dinner we went to a brewery and bought a bag of grains, and, taking our seats in a punt, we rowed to certain mooring-stakes, which projected out of the water at the mouth of a quiet bay. Emptying our bag of grains into the water to act as ground-bait, we baited one line with paste, another with worms, and rigged up a third with a large float and live-bait tackle, upon which the first small roach caught, was impaled. The grains attracted the roach, and the roach attracted the perch and pike. With our rods projecting over the side, and the smoke curling upwards from the pipes of peace, we set ourselves to enjoy the quiet of the evening.

Behind us was the quiet circle of the bay, fringed with reeds and rushes, and decked with the yellow flower of the flag and the white water-crowsfoot. The water-lilies white and yellow, the arrowheads and the pink fleshy spikes of the persicaria filled up the whole of the bay; and in the clear interspaces the water-hens, coots, and dab-chicks swam, nodded, and dived, with great disregard of our presence. Before us the lake lay placid and mirror-like, its surface only disturbed by the water-fowl, or the circles of the rising fish. A little way off a shoal of tench

had come to the surface, and were splashing and sucking with great clumsiness and much noise. The swallows and martins wheeled and darted above us, or descended and dipped in the water with delicate touch ; and from the church-tower the swifts darted with great rapidity, swept around us with piercing scream, and were far away. Ever and anon there came from the distance a swell of dance-music, that filled the listening air with sweet snatches of sound. We wondered whence it came, and enjoyed it the more for its mystery.

Herbert was fishing with paste, and his float began to show symptoms of liveliness, dipping with the quick bites of small roach. As the evening advanced, the roach that he caught were bigger, and the perch came on the feed, so that Piscator saw his float sink with their quick vigorous bite more and more often, and wished that the Gipsy were with him to see what fine sport he was enjoying. Viator alone was dissatisfied. The pike-rod had been assigned to him, and as yet he had had no runs. He began to grumble.

“It is all very well for you fellows to give me this wretched rod. You knew that I should not catch anything. It is just an instance of that selfishness, which all you fellows who call yourselves anglers, always show. It’s my belief that my float frightens the fish. Where is my float !”

It was about two feet under water, sailing away

towards the lilies, and the point of the rod was giving ominous twitches.

“Strike, you duffer!” exclaimed Herbert.

Viator took up the rod and gave such a tremendous strike, that if the line had not been free, and run off the reel, fish and fisher would have parted company. As it was he hooked him safe enough, and after a nice little tussle, during which Viator meekly received much good advice, and some vituperation, from Herbert and Piscator, the pike was safely got on board. It was prime fun to see Viator. The man who professed to look down upon fishing and fishers with supreme contempt, was boyishly pleased with his capture. He turned it over, tried its weight, poked it with his finger, and stroked it again and again with great pride and affection, to the amusement of the other two. After that, too, he paid most assiduous attention to his float, but it did not disappear again in like fashion, and he had to be content with his one fish.

The embracing woods grew dusk about the Mere, the reedwrens sang sweetly in the reeds, and as the sun grew crimson in the west, the full moon rose large and silvery over the eastern woods, and cast a broad stream of light across the water. The gloaming began to gather fast, and we left the Mere to seek the origin of the dance-music, which still went on. Ascending the hill, on the summit of which is the bowling-green, and paying six-pence each for admission, we found that we had lighted

upon the annual festivity of the Ellesmere Ladies' Club. A very grand affair it was. Vigorous dancing was going on on the green, which was resplendent with ladies in full dress, with the single addition of hats or bonnets. The general effect was marred by the appearance of the young men, who, as a rule, wore tall black hats, blue or red neckties, and frock-coats, the tails of which flapped ungracefully as the wearers danced.

The three fishermen felt ashamed of their rough-and-ready costume—straw hats and boating flannels; but conquering their natural modesty, Viator and Herbert secured partners, and Piscator, reflecting that the Gipsy could not see him, secured a pretty girl, and was soon whirling about the smooth lawn as madly as any of them.

VIII.—COEDYRALLT.

WE stood upon the summit of a cliff, and far below us the sacred river Dee flowed, with a current that from this height seemed to be tranquil and smooth, but we knew that the occasional glitter and sparkle told of a rapid, and that the patches of snow-white foam were boiling cascades.

Immediately below was the precipitous rock, seamed by many crevices, and broken by many crags, between which the dark yew trees grew and the ivy climbed. Below the rock was a steep descent, thickly wooded with oak, intermingled with larch, and there beneath its fringe of trees the river ran—the sacred Dee, by which all good Cymri swear. From the mountain springs beyond Llyn Tegid, or Bala lake, the river takes its rise. It flows through the lake from one end to the other, with a separate current they say, which is abundantly proved by the supposed fact that while salmon abound in the river, and gwyniad (char) in the lake, yet never are any salmon found in the lake out of the centre current, and never are the gwyniad found in the current of the river. From the mountain-guarded lake the “Deva, wizard-haunted stream,” hurries along, past Druid’s stone and ancient abbey, towering hills and level meads, through the happy valley of which we shall speak hereafter, and here it is under the wooded cliffs of Coedyrallt, whence it slips away with broadening current under the flying arches of the Pontycysyllte Aqueduct, past the old city of Chester, to the sea.

A vertical sun poured down a flood of light that streamed downwards below us over the warm, grey rocks, dashing from leaf to leaf of the glossy ivy, so that the face of the cliff shone as if it were covered with the silvery spray of a waterfall, and falling upon

the tree-tops, that in rounded masses stood out from mysterious depths of shade, cool and green, on the slope to the river. On the other side of the stream, open meadows rose gradually to the base of other hills; down the river valley to the left, beyond the woods of Wynnstay, were the inner Welsh hills, rising one beyond another with faint blue outlines, while in the foreground, the steep, conical hill of Dinas Bran rose, ruin-crowned and boldly.

The sun was hot, and a south-west breeze scarcely cooled the air; the faint scent of the larches rose up to us from the steaming wood; the river murmured with a sleepy murmur; no white cloud floated in the sky, no sound was heard save the lowing of the cattle standing knee-deep in the shallows; it was noon on a hot summer's day, and we sat on the top of a cliff viewing a fair scene—what wonder then that one of us, feeling within himself the poetry of the scene, and unable to express it in his own words, broke into the words of another? Seated with his back against a rock, and his eyes half closed, he repeated with soft-syllabled voice, the *Lotos Eaters*, and part of it was very apt.

All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream;
Full-faced above the valley stood the moon,
And like a downward smoke the slender stream

Along the cliff to fall, and pause, and fall did seem.
A land of streams ! Some, like a downward smoke
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go ;
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke,
Rolling a slumberous sheet of foam below.
They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
From the inner land : far off, three mountain-tops,
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
Stood sunset-flush'd ; and dew'd with showery drops,
Upclomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.

“Where is Herbert ?” cried the Gipsy, who was of a more practical turn than any of us.

Viator, who was spouting the poetry, looked disgusted at the interruption. Herbert's absence did not warrant the spoiling of the display of his best recitative powers, he thought. But Gipsy had some reason for her question. The rustling of yew branches and the shaking of ivy tendrils below us, indicated the whereabouts of Herbert. He had seen a stock-dove fly to a ledge below him, and from her movements suspected that there was a nest there ; so down he went, to the imminent risk of his neck, and presently came up again, clinging to the ivy like a cat, and with two nearly full-grown stock-doves slung in his handkerchief.

“What are you going to do with those, you naughty boy ?” quoth the Gipsy.

“Eat them,” replied he laconically ; “I'll cook them myself in the tool-house.”

We sought a steep path that wound delicately

around and under a crag, and by its means we reached the foot of the cliff, and plunged at once into a bath of coolness and freshness.

There were cool mosses deep,
And through the moss the ivies crept ;

and as we went down and down, scrambling and falling over stones and tree-roots, passing through a forest of the most luxuriant hartstongue ferns we ever saw. From every little crag and mossy bank they waved their long, graceful fronds, and looked so green and damp and cool that it was a feast to the eyes to dwell upon them. As we neared the river, and the woods were more open, the glades were covered with strawberries, and we picked and ate them greedily.

Then we reached the river, and, as it was too hot and bright to fish, the men left the ladies in a cool, sequestered spot to rest themselves, and went down the stream until they came to a place where it was possible to bathe, and, after that most refreshing operation, they rejoined the ladies and we ate our lunch. Afterwards, Viator, who was no fisherman, elected to stay with the ladies and gather flowers and ferns, while the other two, Piscator and Herbert, went up-stream and fished the streams turn and turn about. Many clouds had now come over the sky, and the fish were rising more freely. At the first stream Herbert tried, he

caught three nice trout, all on the tail-fly, which was one of his own make, and consisted merely of a dun-coloured tackle, ribbed with yellow silk.

We were much bothered by the samlets, which took our flies greedily, and it was a nuisance pulling them out only to throw them in again. The river is the *beau-idéal* of a trout stream. Rapid and stream alternate with deep and eddying pools, and there is every variety of lying and feeding ground for the trout.

All the fish we caught were but of a medium size, except one, and over the taking of that a misadventure occurred. While Herbert was wading in mid-stream, a man in a coracle—those queer canvas boats used by the Welsh fishermen—came floating down the stream, casting his line to right and left, and fishing every yard of the stream, retarding his downward progress meanwhile, by working his paddle with one arm in a figure-of-eight stroke, or resting it against the gravel. Herbert unceremoniously stopped him, and, after a little palaver, the man consented to Herbert's taking his place in the coracle while he waded. No sooner was Herbert installed in the coracle than he went floating down-stream at a great rate, working wildly and vainly with his left arm to retard his speed, and casting as wildly with his right, while Piscator followed him along the bank laughing heartily. At last Herbert stopped himself a little by resting the

blade of the paddle against the stony bed of the river, and was enabled to cast more scientifically. As his flies swept behind a boulder and over the surface of a small eddying pool, there was a rise, and he found he had hooked a big trout, which rushed off up-stream at a great pace. Herbert lifted his left arm to clear his line, which had fouled the reel. In doing so he dropped the paddle and released the coracle, which careered down stream as fast as the trout went up. The line was nearly off the reel ; neither rod nor line could stand the double strain, so he did the best thing he could, and that was to step out of the coracle into the river, which was there about knee deep. Coracles, however, are dangerous things. This one shot from under him as he arose from his seat, and he floundered headlong into the water. Piscator, seeing that he rose to his feet all right, ran on to intercept the coracle, which was half full of water ; and Herbert, looking about as handsome as a wet cat, played and landed his trout without much difficulty.

The afternoon passed pleasantly away like all trout-fishing afternoons should do. There were all the elements of enjoyment—a sunny sky crossed by soft clouds, a south-west wind that, blowing down Bala lake, had raised the river to a fishable height ; the dipper flew from stone to stone, and dived in the quick current ; more than one kingfisher flashed its

brilliant hues along the stream ; the ring-dove cooed in the wood and flew down to the river marge to drink ; the sand-martins wheeled in mazy evolutions over the pools ; the pert water-wagtails ran over the sandbanks and were as proud of their tails as a peacock ; and the river babbled over flashing shallows and moaned in dark pools that slowly eddied under overhanging branches. No pen can describe the fresh beauty of the scene—the blue of the distant reaches of the river was as intense as that of the sky ; the green of the shady hollows of the wood was ethereal in its vividness ; the flowers were like fixed butterflies, and the butterflies were like winged flowers. No one can better know the poverty of language than he who attempts to picture the exceeding beauty of a scene like that and a day like that. His labour becomes but a vain repetition of words, which cease to have any meaning when we compare them with the things they are meant to describe. The sky is blue, the woods are green, the earth is fair—is all that he can say ; and although in each new scene, and each time the old is viewed, there is a newness and freshness which were never felt before, yet only the same old words can be used, and the full heart which pants for utterance, that it may show its appreciation and gratitude for all this loveliness, is baffled and beaten back by the weakness of words.

We came unexpectedly upon the rest of the party. The three ladies had perched themselves, like fairies in a pantomime, in the crevices of a heavily-foliaged crag, and there, among the long, creeping plants and ferns, they comfortably nestled at various altitudes, watching the efforts of Viator, who stood on a sloping rock in the river beneath them. He had cut himself a long hazel-rod, and had rigged up a line from the materials we had left in our baskets, which were in his charge. Procuring some worms by turning over the stones, he had set himself to angle for eels in a sullen-looking pool. His shoes and stockings were off, and the bulging out of his coat pockets told where they were. He stood up to his ankles in the water, in a very insecure position, on the slippery, sloping rock; and, upon Herbert thoughtlessly giving a shout to startle him, his feet flew from under him, and he sat down in the water and commenced sliding down to the deep pool, till he was stopped and unceremoniously dragged back by his coat collar—first himself, then his rod and line, then a small, active eel, which gave him a great deal of trouble to unhook and secure.

It was long past our dinner hour; we had some distance to drive, the coachman was plunging down through the woods in search of us, and we were reluctantly compelled to leave the river and the cool shade.

"Well," said Viator, "I don't care for fishing at all, but such a day as this goes far to make one a fisherman. It has been a perfect day—it is more than a pleasure to live, it is an ecstasy—barring wet coat-tail pockets—on such a day"—and more to the same effect, to which we listened indulgently.

IX.—THE HAPPY VALLEY.

IT was somewhat singular, that just as we sat down to write this chapter, which concerns the pleasant Vale of Llangollen, the post should bring us a letter from an "old chum ;" one who spent his boyhood in that valley, and who is now settled far from us, writing to us but seldom. In his letter he says :—

"I was at Llangollen again yesterday, and was much reminded of our old haunts and walks. The Eglwyseg rocks seemed to hover like a cloud, 'so near and yet so far': near, because I could see not only the bold escarpment, but also 'by faith' the minute stones and bywalks and ledges in the crags ; far, because time always forbids my going up there. The air of those old rocks, and the associations of the river Dee, have had a great effect on my mental constitution."

Four years of our boyhood were spent in the happy valley, and, in company with the writer of the letter, we had explored every nook and cranny of the hills and glens, and fished every yard of river and canal within the circle of mountains that hem in the vale. We made friends with the hill farmers, and were heartily welcomed by them when our rambles led us to their homesteads.

And thus it was that we won the heart to love and remember the beautiful valley. Our rambles were such pleasant ones, we caught such store of fish, obtained so many birds' eggs, climbed so often above the clouds, dived into the deep pools of the river, saw so many rare and lovely things in nature, gained so much pleasant information, and enjoyed such boisterous health during that time, that we christened it the Happy Valley. To us it was no misnomer, for it was a happy valley to us, and through the rose-coloured spectacles of our youth, it seemed a happy place to those that dwelt there. It was little matter to us whether we breathed the delicious enjoyment and life of a bright June day, or trudged over the moorland in the face of a snow-storm ; our rude health and careless minds relished each alike.

Like the Meres, the Vale of Llangollen was a place that the Gipsy *must* see ; and so one sunny day, a party of us drove in a waggonette, passing on our way the massive structure of Chirk Castle, and driving through avenues of mighty trees, which cast their shadows upon

a forest of bracken, where the deer stood and gazed at us.

Following the Dee upwards, we entered the narrow gorge which gives entrance to the vale, and has scarce room for the river, the railway, canal, and a couple of roads to squeeze through. On either side the hills rose steep and thickly-wooded, and some distance below us, the river ran between rocky, tree-covered banks. Before us the village lay, picturesque and irregular. To the left was the long, steep range of the Berwyns, with the bold Geraint, or Barber's Hill, jutting out; to the right was the sugar-loaf of the "Castle Dinas Bran" hill, and beyond that the white limestone terraces and the purple moorland of the Eglwyseg rocks; and far in front were the mountains and glens that were the fairyland of our boyhood.

We had a long summer's day before us, and we determined, after taking the ladies to the top of Dinas Bran, otherwise Crow Castle, to leave them to their own devices, and visit as many of our old fishing haunts as possible. Passing over the old stone bridge, with its angular buttresses, whence we used to "dip" for the large trout that lived in the deep, black pool below, known as Llyn Dhu, we hired a couple of donkeys, and mounting the two ladies thereon, we breasted the hill. A strong wind blew, and when it caught us sideways, it seemed as if donkeys and all must be blown over, so that we men

had to lend our aid to prop up the animals; and, speaking for ourselves, we can say that at certain critical moments, when we were rounding exposed corners, the Gipsy's grip upon our coat collar would not have disgraced a Cornish wrestler. The summit gained, we sought a sheltered corner under the lee of the ruins, whence we could gaze on the valley of the Dee, spanned in the distance by the aerial flight of the aqueduct. Meadow, wood, and stream in their most beautiful aspect met our view, but our gaze lingered more on the rocks to the left. On the opposite side of a valley, three-quarters of a mile broad, rose the stupendous terraced cliffs of the Eglwyseg rocks, rising in snow-white steps, severed by green moss and greener fern, reminding us of the old time when we used to find the nests of the rock-dove and the kestrel in the clefts of the crags, or in the dark yew bushes that clung to the face of the cliff. The ring-ouzel and the stonechat were also common there, and we frequently found their nests. Then if we wandered away over the wild moorland that stretches in one unbroken mass of purple heather from the summit of the highest cliff, we would find the broken shells of eggs dropped by pigeon or crow in their flight, or laid on the ground; and in the marshy spots the nests of the lapwing and curlew.

The whirring of grouse, the laugh of the kestrel, the croak of the raven which we startled from the carcase of

a dead sheep, the cry of the curlew, and the plaint of the lapwing—these were the sounds that met our ears and enchanted us in the days of our youth, and ring in our ears in the night watches now, so that we long to be “off and away to the muirs.”

Crawling up through burn and bracken, louping down the screes ;
Looking out frae craig and headland, drinking up the simmer breeze.
Oh, the wafts o’ heather honey, and the music o’ the brae !

On these moors are lonely tarns, which, we were satisfied, held big fish, though we seldom caught any ; and piled-up cairns, redolent of ancient story ; so that there were all the elements of romance ready to hand for us.

The hand of the spoiler is already at work upon the fair face of the cliffs. The lime-stone quarries rend and tear it in many a place where we have striven in vain to climb the weather-beaten rock. In one place—now vanished—was a sort of natural stair, blocked at the top by a huge stone, underneath which was a crevice wide enough for a slim lad to crawl through. This place we named “Mouse-hole,” and on the top we erected a hut, in which, on holiday afternoons, we sat, like gods at ease, watching the puny world below.

Then, when we crossed over to the other side of the ruins, and, facing the sturdy buffets of the wind, looked over the assemblage of hills—green in the foreground,

and broken with iron-grey slate quarries, and, in the distance, blue and uncertain in outline—was the scene less suggestive.

But a truce to these memories, which, though sweet to us, are of little interest to you. Behold us, therefore, on the banks of the narrow, clear canal, beginning, as we began in our pinafore times, to angle for gudgeon. There were plenty of caddis worms, or "corbets," as we called them formerly, creeping about at the bottom of the water, close to the margin; and, drawing one out of its case, we put the plump, white grub on our hook. The gudgeons were nosing about on the gravel in companies of a dozen or two, and, as the bait floated by them, one darted aside at it with a silvery flash, and was twitched out. In a short time we had caught a dozen of all sizes, from that of a minnow to six inches in length. Having thus procured plenty of bait we turned our fly-rod into something more like a spinning-rod, by substituting a stouter top joint, and then, rigging up some spinning tackle mounted on gut, we baited with a gudgeon, and commenced to trail the bait in the canal, walking slowly the while along the bank. In this way we had formerly taken many small jack, from two to four pounds in weight, and, ere long, we found that we could repeat the old performance. Cunningly guiding the glittering bait along a lane of water between two masses of weed, a

jack darted out from under one of them, and hooked himself fast. He was three pounds in weight, and our fly-rod gave a decent amount of play ere he was grassed, or, to speak more correctly, gravelled. The next capture was a little larger, and came from beneath the stonework of a bridge, and further on still, a smaller one was brought to book. It was a pretty sight to see the fish dart and rush in the air-clear water, and dive under the green weeds.

In this manner we walked along the canal until the scene grew very wild and picturesque. Close on the left the river foamed over its rocks and its salmon weirs; on the right the canal became narrower and deeper, and the rocks overhanging it on the other side were fringed with ferns, laced with brambles, and cushioned with moss. Beyond the canal a long slope of green mountain arose, thickly dotted with gracefully drooping birches. Down that glen flows a capital trout brook, and, if you were to follow it upwards, you would come to the splendid ruins of Valle Crucis Abbey, and, in a pool in a garden hard by, you would see some gigantic trout swimming about in pampered pride.

A little further in front, the canal issues out of the river, where a semicircular weir of great extent dams up the broad stream. It is worth while to cross the rickety old structure known as the chain-bridge, and to ascend to the Berwyn Station to see the view up

the river, which, with its reaches of water seen between distant woods, should be drawn by Birket Foster.

Below the chain-bridge are two gorges, through which the whole river foams ; although their names, the Cow's Leap and the Robber's Leap, indicate their narrowness. Below each of these is a whirling and eddying pool, where minnow-spinning has often proved deadly to the trout. We baited with the smallest of our gudgeons, and in the lower pool, notwithstanding the brightness of the day and the clearness of the water, we hooked and landed a trout of a pound and a quarter in weight, which is much above the average weight of trout in the Dee. Then we mounted our flies, and carefully picking our way over the uneven rocks, we fished the best of the streams and pools down to the "Llan," arriving at the town with a couple of dozen trout, all small—a bag which was by no means a contemptible one for the Dee, which in its open portions is considerably overfished.

After dinner we again started, while the others strolled in the garden of the "Royal," and threw pebbles at the rising trout in the still pool above the weir. We hastened on until we came to a deep pool enshrouded with rocks and trees, and after sitting for half-an-hour over a pipe to let our dinner partly digest, we stripped and plunged in the deep pool off the old diving-rock, while the roach—of which fish there are

too many in the quiet parts of the river—darted away from before us in all directions. An old feat was to scramble to the top of a rapid above the pool, and then to swim downwards in a rush of white water through a narrow gorge into the eddying pool. We did this once again, and thereupon wondered how it was that we did it so often and safely when we were boys. It struck us as being an exemplification of the old proverb that “fools rush in where wise men fear to tread.”

There was but one thing more wanting to complete the old fishing round, and that was soon done. Wading through a shallow part of the river, and carrying our clothes across, we dressed, and clambering through a thicket reached the foot of the canal embankment, and were soon on its banks. Close by was a “basin” or wider space where the canal barges are turned. In this quiet, weedy spot the roach were swimming in hundreds, just the same as if years had not passed since we fished for them before. With a black gnat and a small “coch a bonddu,” each tipped with a bit of kid glove, we were soon doing execution among the silver-scaled beauties. They were rising gently all over the still surface, and we threw our flies before the biggest of them, and watched them sail up to the bit of feather and open their mouths just with the intention

of *tasting*—no more ; but ah ! a quick jerk of the wrist, and the steel goes *home*.

While the evening breeze sang quietly in the tree-tops, and the sunset flush filled the fragrant air, the sand-martins flew lower, the bats fluttered above us, and followed with quick turns the wave of our line; and the peace of the dying day was only disturbed by the wind playing on its harp, the hurried twitter of the martins, the shrill squeak of the bats, and the splash of a captured roach.

* * * * *

Many other such days, and then, refreshed and strengthened, we rush once more into the toil and turmoil of life.

ANGLING ACQUAINTANCES.

IT is not of the acquaintances which the angler has among human kind that we write, although much might be said upon such a topic, for angling, like poverty, makes us acquainted with strange companions. There is another class of acquaintances of which the angler should know more than he often does know—the beasts and the birds with which his waterside rambles bring him into contact. The angler's friends among men are usually pleasant fellows, for “birds of a feather flock together,” and, if he but knows them aright, the birds and the animals are pleasant friends too. Every angler should be a naturalist, or have, at least, an intelligent knowledge of the more interesting of the component parts of that great thing called Nature, which makes angling what it is. It is astonishing how much the interest of a ramble is increased by such a knowledge. Depend upon it, the difference

between "Eyes and no eyes" is greater than is at first apparent, and to no man is this more important to be understood, than the follower of the gentle craft.

Angling acquaintances, then, of the sort of which we write, may fairly be divided into two classes: those which live upon fish, and are anglers themselves, forming one; and those whose presence by the water-side is an attribute of it, and brings them constantly under the angler's notice, forming the other. The birds are plenty, the animals few. Of the latter, the only two that come within the province of such an article as this, are the otter and the water-rat. Comparatively few are the anglers who, in the course of their rambles, have met with the former. It is only when the dusk falls greyly over the river, or the early dawn is breaking, that he whose inclinations lead him to the river-side, may hear a light plunge, and see a dark body glancing off a grey rock into the circling water. The otter is nocturnal in his habits, and few men linger sufficiently late by the river-side, or rise sufficiently early, to keep him company in his fishing rambles; or even if they do so, they rarely move along the bank with that quietness and caution which is needful ere you may catch a glimpse of him on the bank. We believe the otter is much less rare than is generally supposed. It was our practice in our younger days to be much at the river-side in

the early morning hours, and many a time have we seen and heard otters when it was believed that there were no such animals in the river. They move with such exceeding stealthiness that a keen observation is needful to detect them, and it is well known that country folk have but little keenness of observation where country sights and sounds are concerned. On many of the Welsh rivers they are tolerably plentiful, and also in the wilder streams of the north of England and Scotland.

According to Stoddart, the otter has much increased of late years on the Tweed, and so far from the spread of cultivation having been any check to it, it appears to have aided it in its increase, from the fact that the greater number of drains and culverts have afforded it more and safer places of refuge than formerly existed.

The long, lithe body and short legs of the otter will indicate, even to him who looks upon it for the first time, that the animal belongs to the group comprising the ferret, the polecat, and the weasel—but while all its *confrères* live upon flesh, to the otter all days are Fridays, for it lives almost entirely upon fish. Indeed, our forefathers were much in doubt as to whether the otter was not a fish itself, and so little has their doubt been resolved by certain of their descendants, that the Roman Catholic Church still

allows its flesh to be eaten on Fridays and fast days.

In length the otter is, from its snout to the tip of its tail, about three feet four inches, and its tail takes up a third of its length. It weighs, when full grown, from twenty to twenty-four pounds, and even more. Pennant gives an instance of one which weighed forty pounds. As befits an animal which lives so constantly under water, it is peculiarly constructed. Its head is broad and flat, and it has a broad muzzle, with a thick, overhanging upper lip. Its body is long and low, and much flattened horizontally. Its tail is flat and broad, and acts like a rudder, and its limbs are loosely jointed, so that the otter can quickly turn in any direction while it swims; and its broad feet are webbed. In general colour the otter is of a rich brown, but its body is covered with two distinct and very different coats of fur, "the shorter being extremely fine and soft, of a lightish-grey colour, and brown at the tips; the longer are stiffer and thicker, very shining, greyish at the base, bright, rich brown at the points, especially at the upper parts, and the outer surface of the legs."

So much for the outer appearance of our shy and retiring friend. During the night he wanders boldly about the streams and rivers, "seeking his prey from God;" in the daytime he is "at home" in a deep burrow in the river's bank, in the interstices of a crag,

or mid the tangled roots of a tree, whence it would be hard for spade to oust him. The mouth of the burrow is as near as may be to the usual level of the river, but we do not think it is actually below water, as some authorities assert. In this snug abode, on a couch of leaves, he sleeps comfortably until the sun goes down, and here the female brings forth her litter of four or five when the land brightens with spring.

And now let us look at a summer's night and day from the otter's point of view.

It is a deep, slow reach of river, running between close-wooded banks, where the oak and ash are seamed by the silvery birches, which look ghost-like in the coming twilight. The fire of sunset has departed, leaving but a sullen red in the clouds, which hang low in the west. The gloaming steals darkly over the river, and faint wreaths of mist rise from the quiet bays. The brown owl flits between the stems of the oaks, the water-hens come nodding from the thickly-herbaged banks, the trout rise with noisy splashes, and the circles sail down the smooth stream and mingle with others.

The day has ended,
The night has descended.

How does the otter in his deep hole—where day and night it must be pitch dark—tell when the day changes into night? Yet, as the daylight fades, he starts from

his heavy sleep, and showing his teeth as he yawns—and a capital set of teeth they are—he uncoils himself from his bed of dried leaves, and sets out on his evening stroll. As he creeps through the marginal bushes, he comes suddenly upon a water-hen, at whom he makes a playful snap, tearing out some of her wing-feathers. He leaps down upon a mud-bank, and finds himself face to face with a heron, standing solemnly upon one leg, intently watching a shallow. The two rival anglers watch each other with dubious looks. The otter snarls at the bird, and the latter gives a startled leap and a half-peck at the intruder. The otter is inclined for hostilities, but he is afraid of the sharp and threatening beak of the bird. Just then, however, he catches sight of an object which is of more interest to him at present than a combat. It is the snout and neck of an eel projecting from the muddy bank. The otter slips into the water, and ere the eel can withdraw into its fastness, it is in his cruel gripe, and is drawn out of the mud and carried to the opposite bank, where, as the beast is hungry, it is eaten up—head, and tail, and bones, and all. The otter then takes to the water, and, after cruising about a little, he sees another eel swimming with slow and sinuous motion. This he has no difficulty in seizing, but instead of being despatched like the former, it is carried to the bank and left there, where, if by any chance he should return hungry, it will be ready

for him. A large trout next claims his attention, and, in that wide reach of water, the fish is more than a match for the beast, although the latter carries on the chase with great perseverance, swimming under water, and following the trout in all its darts and windings, with astonishing rapidity, rising now and then to the surface to breathe. But he cannot corner the trout, which is a cunning old stager, and will not poke its head into a hole. The otter gives it up at last, and seeing an unwary chub rising at a moth, he seizes it, and carries it to a rock, where, after taking a bite from its shoulder, he leaves it as he left the eel. The otter longs for trout, and trout he will have, and he knows where to get them.

A good-sized burn runs into the river from out a craggy, wild, and wooded dene, where it leaps over a score of waterfalls, and eddies into a hundred pools. Up this the otter takes his way, pushing through bramble and brier, and splashing over stream and shallow in a very business-like way. He comes to where the burn, fast sweeping over a slanting rock, spreads out into a clear, deep pool. The otter gazes into the pool with eyes that in the dark glare luminously, and sees a large trout poising itself midway in the clear water. With an almost noiseless plunge the beast dives into the pool, and, quick as thought, the fish pops under a stone. The otter kicks the stone away with his paw,

snaps up poor trouty, and in a few minutes has eaten a considerable portion of it. So, up the brook he goes—"the dainty old thief of an otter"—capturing a fish here and there, eating some, and leaving others with barely a bite taken out of the shoulder. The moon rises large and red over the hill, and sends bright sheets of light between the oak trees. The robber growls at the bright-faced moon, for she sends strange shadows upon the earth which make him tremble with fright.

He at last begins to retrace his steps towards the river, for it is close upon dawn, and daylight must see him in his "hover," as otter-hunters call his burrow. Hark! what is that noise that is borne upon the chill morning breeze? He stops, and listens intently. It is repeated. He knows it too well. It is the twang of a horn, and close upon it is the belling of a hound. The otter-hunters are a-foot, and, as he still listens, the loud chorus of hound-cries rings through the wood. He knows that they have found his scent or "drag," and have cut off his retreat from the river. There is no place in the pool where he can conceal himself, so he turns tail and bounds through the wood, following the stream upwards, fear lending speed to his feet, until he reaches the open fields. Crossing these at a gallop, he strikes the head of another burn, and tearing down this he regains the river. Even as he does so he is overtaken, and surrounded by his pursuers in

the shallow stream. An eager sportsman dashes up to his waist in the water, and seizes the otter by his tail in the approved method, but he is not quick enough. Ere he can swing the poor hunted beast clear of the water, the latter has turned round and made his teeth meet in the arm of his would-be captor, who lets him go. The otter slips past the hounds and regains the deep water, and shortly afterwards his home, where he gathers himself up panting and weary, and whence the united efforts of his enemies fail to dislodge him.

Otter-hunting is a sport which still flourishes in the west and north of England, and very fine sport it is. It is necessary to rise early, or the scent of the otter will have disappeared. Hard running, and plenty of it, jumping, wading, and even swimming, combine to render it a laborious and healthy exercise.

The otter does not confine himself exclusively to fish diet. When fish are scarce he will travel far inland, and, pressed by hunger, attack poultry, and also lambs or sucking-pigs. But such instances are very rare, and as a general rule the otter has no worse sin to answer for than that of killing fish; and we think there are few anglers so bigoted, and such poor naturalists, as to be jealous of, and to wish to exterminate, this wild and interesting species.

The otter may be tamed and taught to catch fish for its master, and many instances of its doing this

have been recorded. It shows great attachment to its young, and is very fierce in their defence, even attacking and driving away those who have tried to capture the young ones. Occasionally it will make its way to the sea, and even swim a good way out from land in pursuit of fish. Much more might be written about the otter, but other angling acquaintances claim our consideration.

Next in order on our list, but with a very wide gap between it and the otter, comes the water-rat or water-vole, and as it is such a small animal we will add to its importance by giving it its proper Latin name of *Auricola amphibius*. It is a little creature, much prettier than the common rat, and with its brown soft fur, and round snout, and black beady eyes, it is not by any means an ugly object. While walking by the water-side, one hears a splash, and sees a train of bubbles dimpling the surface, and one knows that it is either a water-hen, or a water-rat. If it be the latter, it will come to the surface in about a minute to breathe. Every rambler by the water-side knows the difference there is in the appearance of the water-vole and the common rat, and he ought also to know the great and important difference there is in their habits. The common rat lives upon fish, flesh, or fowl, when it can get them. The water-rat lives entirely upon roots, or sub-aquatic plants. They often bear upon their

shoulders the sins of their more rapacious brethren, but there is no reason why they should be destroyed, save in those places where their habit of burrowing in the banks might be productive of damage.

In the "Journal of a Naturalist" there is an interesting anecdote of this little animal. The writer says: "A large stagnant piece of water in an inland county, with which I was intimately acquainted, and which I very frequently visited for many years of my life, was one summer suddenly infested with an astonishing number of the short-tailed water-rats, none of which had previously existed there. Its vegetation was the common production of such places, excepting that the larger portion of it was densely covered with its usual crop, the small horsetail (*equisetum limosum*). This constituted the food of the creatures, and the noise made by their champing it we could distinctly hear in the evening at many yards' distance. They were shot by dozens daily, but the survivors seemed quite regardless of the noise, the smoke, the deaths around them. Before the winter this great herd disappeared, and so entirely evacuated the place that a few years after I could not obtain a single specimen."

When capes and bays of rivers are shady in the gloaming, how often have we seen the heron slowly winging its way down stream, turning its head and long neck this way and that, looking for a likely spot

to settle, its large, grey shape dimly reflected in the misty water. A bird of weird and ghost-like aspect is the heron, but one which is a favourite with the angler; for whether he comes suddenly upon it by some lonely tarn-side, standing knee-deep in the shallows, with its neck drawn back, and head resting on its breast, or watches its slow and laboured flight as it awkwardly takes wing from the river-bank as he suddenly approaches, it is an interesting and beautiful object. It awakens memories of olden times when the heron was the favourite quarry of the hawkers. What an exciting thing it must have been, to have seen the noble falcon swoop upon the huge-winged heron, and to see the bird turn over on its back, and with long, sharp beak and talons fight savagely to the last.

When the heron is on the wing its flight is apparently slow. When you come upon it suddenly, it has a very awkward and ugly way of taking wing, stretching out its neck, and hunching up its back in an ungainly fashion. When it is fully on the wing its neck is stretched out before and its legs behind, and when it alights, it brings its legs forward with a peculiar "hoist." Although its flight seems slow, the beats of its wings are far quicker than one would imagine, inasmuch as they average 120 a minute. How quick, then, must be the vibrations of the wings of smaller birds!

The food of the heron is principally fish, and to

catch these it stands in some shallow portion of the river or lake, where the water is tolerably quiet, and thus it watches until its prey passes within reach, when out darts its long neck, and the passing trout or eel is caught between the long sharp mandibles. If it be an eel, the heron has often some difficulty in killing it, but it takes particular care to do it effectually by nipping it in the back, for a live eel wriggling about in its inside would be far from pleasant. In default of the fish diet, the heron will eat the young of water-fowl, mice, frogs, &c. It has been known to seize a wounded snipe which had fallen near it, and to swim out for several yards to seize the newly-hatched young from the water-hens' nests.

Although, as a general rule, the heron is a solitary feeder, it has gregarious breeding habits, nesting together in large companies like rooks. There are several heronries in England, but they are scattered far and wide; and the heron flies long distances night and morning in quest of food. It builds on the extreme tops of the tallest trees, and as near the end of the branch as possible, for the size of the bird makes it inconvenient for it to penetrate far amid the branches of the tree. It lays its eggs, which are of a light bluish-green colour, early in the spring. It is said that if it accidentally drops the food it is carrying to its young to the ground, it does not take the trouble to pick it

up again, but flies off for more. This may arise from the difficulty it has in rising from the ground in a confined space.

Some years ago there appeared in one of the illustrated papers a bird's-eye view of a heronry from *above*. The enterprising artist had climbed to the summit of a tall tree overlooking the heronry, and from thence made his sketch. It was a very novel and interesting sight. The herons were flying about in dire alarm, or swaying uncomfortably on the pliant branches. Many of the nests which were not tenanted by the herons were occupied by squirrels, and by hawks, jackdaws, and other birds.

But we think the prettiest object of all those which greet the eye of the angler by the river-side, is the kingfisher, whether it skims so swiftly along the river, midway between the banks, that it looks like one continuous line of blue, and green, and orange; or, rarer and lovelier still, when it hovers hawk-like over the water, and then plunges down upon the fish below. No bird is a greater favourite of ours than the kingfisher, and we much regret that each year it is becoming rarer, even on our most preserved streams. Its beauty makes it sought after by every gunner, who finds a ready market for its skin. Many are the times we have stopped in our fishing to watch it sitting on a bough projecting over the water, its orange breast

shining brightly against the fresh green of the willows behind it. It sits motionless, until the gleam of a minnow below attracts its attention, and then it dives like a flash of coloured light into the water, to re-appear with a silvery morsel in its beak. A toss and twist of its head and the fish is bolted, and the bird sits motionless again. The kingfisher has been known to perch upon the rod of an angler, when he has been standing still and quiet on the bank.

The kingfisher nests in holes in the bank. It sometimes takes possession of the deserted hole of a sand-martin, but more often, we imagine, it makes a hole for itself. The bank chosen is a soft gravelly one, such as those which often overhang the outer curve of an eddying pool. The burrow is from two to three feet deep, and often curved. At the end it is enlarged, so as to form a sort of chamber, and on the floor of this are laid six, or eight, round white eggs, of such brilliant whiteness and transparency as to be excessively beautiful. The old birds show great attachment to their home, and return to it year after year. Even if their eggs are disturbed again and again the same year, they will continue to lay. In course of time the deposit of fish-bones arising from the excrements of the birds accumulates in the nest, and as the eggs are laid on these, it has been said that the kingfishers purposely make their nests of fish-bones; but this we do not

think is the case. Stevenson, in his "Birds of Norfolk," gives such an interesting account of the discovery and analysis of a kingfisher's nest, that but little apology is necessary for our quoting it here. He says:—

"The drain or 'dyke,' as it is called in Norfolk, was rather wide, and the hole, which I should certainly have taken for a rat's, was about a foot below the top of the bank, and the same distance from the water. We first took the precaution to introduce some paper into this aperture, spreading it over the eggs, to prevent the soil from crumbling into the nest, and then dug carefully down upon the paper, extracting a large circular piece of turf; but, in spite of all our precautions, the earth, owing to a long-continued drought, was too friable to be kept from partially falling in. Carefully brushing this away and removing the paper, we discovered the nest, for such with its raised sides it might fairly be called, occupying a round chamber at the upper end of the passage, which sloped gradually upwards from the point of entrance. From the mouth of the hole to the circular bed was about two feet, and the chamber containing the nest itself was about six or eight inches in diameter, and completely filled with the remains of fish, in every stage of decomposition. The eggs, seven in number, exhibiting the usual pinky hue of the yolk showing through their glossy shells, were laid exactly in the centre, and reposed on a strata of

fragmentary fish-bones, pure white, and by no means offensive ; but a slightly raised wall of similar substances, of a dirty-yellow tint, crumbling to the touch and alive with maggots, was far from pleasant ; and I doubt not consisted of the recent deposits of the old bird or birds whilst sitting, the bleached-looking bones beneath the eggs being evidently of older date, and dried, no doubt, by the warmth of their bodies. On inserting a spade beneath the entire mass, in order to carry away as much as possible, we found apparent evidence of this hole having been tenanted for more than one season, since below the white bones forming the actual nest, was at least an inch in depth of former *dejecta*. This under layer was also very dark in colour, and very *lively*, whilst that portion nearest the walls of the chamber was quite dry and caked into the surrounding soil. Amongst the half-digested portions of bone, I particularly noticed the remains of beetle-cases, and one large fragment of a water-beetle (*notonecta*), with the claws complete ; but all these substances were confined exclusively to the nesting-chamber, and were not scattered about the passage leading thereto, nor was there a single atom of grass, straw, or such-like material to be seen anywhere. Wishing to preserve, not only the eggs, but the strange bed on which they were placed, the whole mass, on our reaching home, was turned into a muslin bag,

and by placing that in a colander and allowing water to run freely through it for some time, all the earthy particles were soon washed out; and the maggots were as effectively destroyed, by a single immersion in boiling water. The bones, thus thoroughly cleansed and sifted, were next turned out upon a sheet of blotting paper, and then laid on a wire sieve to strain and dry, till in a few hours the entire heap looked as white and free from all impurities as the portion on which the eggs had been first seen. On weighing these bones, thus freed from all foreign particles, I found they amounted to exactly 1,080 grains, or two ounces and a quarter and thirty grains."

During a severe frost the kingfisher has been known to be frozen by the claws to his perch, by the water dripping from it after a dive, and to die. What a sad end for the beautiful bird!

Next to the kingfisher the greatest ornament to our streams is the dipper. On some boulder that stems the eddying current it rests, with its white breast facing you, and its tail jerking like a robin's. It dives into the water and reappears a yard or two off, then flies to another stone and repeats the process, and then, as you approach, it flies onward with a straight flight like that of the kingfisher. In a short time you again come up with it, and you may so keep the same bird before you for a couple of miles. The

dipper is a lonely bird, frequenting sequestered and secluded spots, and more than two are seldom seen together.

It nests very early in the year, and builds a large, fine nest after the pattern of the wren's, domed, and with a small hole as entrance. It is placed in a crevice of a rock, between the roots of trees that overhang the river, and oftentimes in a hole in a wheel, or rock, in the very splash of the waterfall. The eggs are five in number, and are pure white, and very pointed, and somewhat less in size than those of a thrush. Like the kingfisher, the dipper reappears year after year at the same nest, and when one pair dies, another will take up the old quarters. The dipper has a faint, sweet, piping song, which sounds like the echo of a rivulet's music.

There are two vexed questions concerning the dipper, which have caused a great amount of controversy. One is, What does the dipper eat? and the other is, Can it walk under water? With regard to the former, our observation has convinced us that the dipper lives almost exclusively upon insects. Now and then, it is possible he may gobble up a few grains of spawn which have escaped from their bed, but it is clear that if the dipper did not eat them the fish would. Numbers of dippers have been shot through the mistaken idea that they are great devourers of spawn, and they have

much decreased in consequence. This is a thousand pities, and we wish to say what we can to stop useless and cruel massacre. Assertion is no use without proof, and no one can prove that the dipper eats spawn, while abundant proof can be adduced to the contrary. It will be sufficient for us now to quote the opinions of three well-known naturalists :—

Macgillivray says, “I have opened a great number of individuals at all seasons of the year, but have never found any other substances in the stomach than *lymnææ*, *ancyli*, *coleoptera*, and grains of gravel.”

Gould says, “During my visit, in November, 1859, to Penoyre, the seat of Col. Watkyns, on the river Usk, the water-ouzzels were very plentiful, and the keeper informed me that they were then feeding on the recently-deposited roe of the trout and salmon. By the colonel’s desire five specimens were shot for the purpose of ascertaining by dissection the truth of this assertion, but I found no trace whatever of spawn in either of them. Their hard gizzards were entirely filled with larvæ of *phryganea* and the water-beetle (*hydrophilus*).”

Buckland says, “It may be observed that I do not mention the water-ouzel as destructive to spawn: this advisedly, as of late I have carefully examined the gizzards of several of these beautiful little birds, and have found only the remains of water insects in them;

write the water-ouzel the *friend*, and not the enemy of the fish spawn."

We think also that it is quite clear that dippers can walk under water. There is no evidence against it except the assertion of those who say it is impossible for a bird, which is so much lighter than water, to be able to walk under it. If they would examine the foot of a dipper, they would see that its claws are admirably formed to enable the bird to cling to the stones at the bottom of the stream, and it is, in fact, by their aid, that the dipper manages to walk or scramble, not only under water, but up-stream as well. Our own observation of these birds has been keen, and we are convinced that the dipper can, and does, walk under water, and that for three or four yards, and it is some time picking up its insect-food from between the stones. We may be permitted, however, to support our assertion by the following quotation from a paper read some time ago by Dr. J. R. Kinahan, before the Dublin Natural History Society, and which we read in "Science Gossip" for 1866:—

"During the years 1849 and 1850, having nearly daily occasion to frequent that part of the River Dodder which passes through the romantic mountain glens of Glemismaul and Castlekelly, the great abundance of the water-ouzel, or, as the peasantry there call it, king-

fisher, induced me to study its habits somewhat particularly.

“ The general habits of the water-ouzel have been so well and so often described that they need not detain us ; but, although it is now some years since M. Herbert announced the fact that this bird is possessed of the power of walking under water, on the bottom of streams ; and although the truth of this observation has been strengthened by the evidence of such men as St. John, Dilwyn, Rennie, William Thompson, and Macgillivray, yet still there are found many—especially among the closet naturalists—who prefer to ignore the fact altogether, or else assert that this bird’s habits in this respect are identical with those of other divers.

“ My observations, made repeatedly during many months, and having for their object the elucidation of this very point, enable me to corroborate M. Herbert’s account in every particular, except that the bird carries down a supply of air to the bottom, enclosed within its wings, in which he most certainly is in error, led away by a fancied analogy between the bird and diving-beetles ; as I have repeatedly seen them rise to the surface to obtain air, which they do exactly like a grebe, merely raising the tip of the bill out of the water.

“ The bird has several modes of diving : when seeking food it generally goes down—like most divers—head foremost, in an oblique direction, or else walks

deliberately in from the shallow edge of the pool, the head bent down, and the knees (tarsal articulation) crouched. When seeking refuge, however, it sometimes sinks like a stone, exactly as the great northern diver, *C. glacialis*, has been observed to do ; that is, gradually, the top of the head the last part submerged, without any apparent exertion ; sometimes in the midst of its most rapid flight dropping down suddenly into the water like a plummet. Its course is indifferently with or across the stream, rarely against it.

“ It often remains under water, totally submerged, for fifty seconds or upwards, and during that time will proceed from ten to twenty yards. When it comes out the water may be seen running rapidly off its plumage. It swims with great rapidity, and appears to rejoice in the water as its true element ; hardly ever alighting directly on a rock, but, even after its longest flight, splashing slap into the water at the base of a stone selected as a resting-place, and then scrambling to the summit of this. In its motion in the water it more closely resembles the jackass penguin of Cape Horn (*Apt. chrysocoma*) than any other aquatic bird I have had an opportunity of studying. Like that bird—especially in the breeding season—the ouzels may be seen at times leaping right out of the water in their gambols.

“ That the bird actually does possess the power of

motion under water, the following notes on a wounded bird, made on the spot, abundantly prove :—

“‘November 29th, 1850.—Bohernabreena.—Wounded a water-ouzel, which, as I observed them all to do, immediately made for shore. On my going to seize him, he darted into the water, running slap in. Waded in after him. Under water he looks quite glossy, but does not seem increased in bulk, the glossiness probably arising from the oiled state of the plumage, or else from its peculiar texture. When I first got up with the bird he was perfectly stationary at the bottom, not using any exertion to remain there (this remark applies to two other birds wounded later in the day, which also took to the water). The bird next got under a big stone, and when I poked him out on one side he ran to the other. After the lapse of a minute or so he put his head out of the water to breathe, always keeping the stone between him and me ; and when I tried to catch him he would dodge under the water again, and come up on the other side.

“‘Finding that I was still chasing him, he took to the stream, and went under water faster than I could follow him. He seemed to move now entirely by means of his feet, his wings hanging down behind his tail ; though his motions were so quick it was difficult to be positive as to the latter part of this observation. At times he swam in mid-water, using his wings, crossing the current several times, and seeming but little incommoded by it.

“‘All at once he turned over on his back—still possessing the power of continuing under water—struggling to regain his original position, he spun round and round. It appeared as though the wounded wing had suddenly failed him, and thus prevented his preserving a due equilibrium in the water. At length he came to the top, when he immediately righted and swam as at other times. Every time I tried to lay hold of him he again ducked and dived down to the bottom, at first all right, and then the tumbling began again. When captured at length, I found him merely winged. I was enabled to confirm these observations several times that day, as I obtained seven specimens, five of which necessitated a watery chase before I succeeded in catching them, and one got clear off.’”

Such testimony should settle the matter at last. We hope it will be a very long time ere the dipper is banished from our trout streams, for without it a great part of their charm would be lost to us.

Everyone knows the common water-hen. Where rivers slowly sweep between rushy banks, where the lake bends into quiet bays, and in the small rushy “pits” in fields, even close to houses, the water-hen is to be seen making its way through the weeds, or swimming across the tiny bays, jerking its head and making as much fuss as if it were swimming twice as fast as it really is doing. It gives life and motion to many a lake that would other-

wise be dull and drear, and its appearance in every small rushy pond adds great interest to the country ramble. The nest of the water-hen is one of the earliest prizes to the bird-nesting schoolboy. The large, shallow structure, made of dry flags and water-plants, is generally placed amid the rushes or reeds on the margin of a pool, and is conspicuous enough, but the bird sometimes departs from its usual habits, and builds its nest above the water. We have found one in the crown of an old pollard willow, which slanted over a pool. Though, usually, water-hens live entirely among the coarse herbage by the waterside, and in the water itself, in severe weather, when they are frozen out of their ordinary haunts, they will perch in trees, notwithstanding their webbed feet. We have seen more than a dozen in a small fir tree by a pool's side. In such weather, too, they will crowd to any spot which is unfrozen in great numbers. While out shooting once we came to a reach of the river Vyrnwy, which was completely frozen over, except a small spot around a willow bush which had fallen into the stream. Noticing a peculiar motion of the water about this spot, we went up to the bush, and lo ! at least a score of water-hens flew out. The flurry and confusion was so great that, although we fired both barrels, we killed nothing.

When disturbed the water-hen dives, or resorts to the shelter of the herbage, but when hard pressed it takes to

its wings with an ungainly flight, its legs hanging down and neck outstretched. When once fairly on the wing they can fly for a considerable distance, and at night their notes may be heard in the summer time, as they fly at a considerable height overhead. It is supposed that it is chiefly the males which have this nocturnal habit. The water-hen dives with great facility, and can remain under water for a length of time. It also seeks concealment by sinking in the water until only its beak is visible above the surface, and remains in that position, holding on by some weed or branch, until the danger has passed.

Instances have been known of its feigning death, after the manner of the corncrake, as a last chance of escape.

If unmolested the water-hen will become very tame, and will come and feed with domestic fowls in the farm-yard. It rears two or three broods in the year, and it has been observed that the brood first hatched helps to feed and look after the young of the second brood, but as soon as the third brood is hatched the first is sent about its business. If the nest is much exposed, the water-hen will sometimes cover it with the leaves of dried flags before she leaves it, but it is not often that this is done, and it can scarcely be called a distinguishing habit, as it is in the case of the grebe.

Less common than the last-mentioned bird, the coot

is yet a well-known bird, and, when swimming in company with the water-hen, is easily distinguished from it by the white patch on its head. In its habits it is like the water-hen, but is shyer and more retiring. It is also stronger on the wing, and takes long migrations from one part of the kingdom to another. Its nest is also much more substantially built, and often floats upon the surface of the water, held in its place only by the reeds growing around it. A strong wind once drove the nest of a coot from its moorings, and it floated hither and thither on the surface of the lake, according to the direction of the wind. Notwithstanding this the old bird continued to sit, and eventually brought off her brood.

The scenery of our larger lakes would not be complete without the presence of the grebes. The larger one, the great-crested grebe, is the rarer, but we think it quite possible that it is the more generally known to the majority of fishermen. Its size and remarkable appearance ensure its being observed; and then it keeps so carefully out in the open water, away from other birds, that it cannot be overlooked when it is present on the Mere. If you row near it, it turns its head suspiciously from side to side, and sinks low in the water, until only its head and long neck are visible above the surface, then if you approach nearer, it dives with the quickness of lightning. It is quite impossible

to say where it will rise after its dive, for it will swim under water a long way, and twist and turn about if followed. Its nest is simply a mass of black and soaking weeds, almost level with the surface of the water; and the eggs, which are white when laid, soon become stained and darkened by the decaying vegetable matter. When the old bird leaves the nest she carefully covers the eggs with weeds, so that a casual observer would be far from suspecting that that ill-shaped mass of wet weed was a nest containing eggs.

The smaller grebe or dabchick is common everywhere, where there are lakes, ponds, or quiet rivers. In its breeding habits it is like its larger brother; but it is not quite so shy, and, if you will only keep quite still, you may watch it at only a few yards' distance, but if you move but a finger it dives instantly, with a very little splash, and a kick of its legs. If it apprehend danger it will keep under water for an incredible length of time, but if it be not much frightened it will pop up again like a cork, and shake the water off itself in silvery drops. It is a very pretty sight to see a pair of old birds feeding their young, in some clear spot between the floating vegetation. The young ones are such little black dots, and the movements of all of them are so quick and comical, that one cannot help being interested and amused.

The pretty, little snipe-like bird that skims with graceful flight from the advancing angler, or runs along the sandy bays of the stream, or runs lightly over the lily leaves on the placid pool, is the common sandpiper, a bird not uncommon by most of our rivers. It makes its nest in some sly hole in the bank, or even dispenses with a nest altogether, and lays its eggs in a hollow on the ground.

Such, then, are the chief among an angler's acquaintances, but there are many others he would not willingly pass. The sandmartins sweeping and whirling over the stream, dashing this way and that, and altering their course with wonderful celerity, in the pursuit of their insect prey, and drilling the gravel escarpment with the numerous holes of their nesting-places; the water-wagtail merrily wagging its tail, and snapping up the insects at the margin of the water; the gaudy dragon-flies hovering and darting in the blazing sunlight; the shining water-beetles gyrating, multitudinous, in the quiet pools—these and many others come within the term of the angler's acquaintances. And may they not be the angler's *friends* too? Even those which are avowedly destructive to fish, is it too great a stretch of clemency to spare them from slaughter, and show them at least negative friendship? Live and let live is a good motto. There is enough and to spare for all who are not greedy, and where the fish are decreasing it is

not from the depredations of those whose cause we plead, but from the folly and wastefulness of man himself. Drains and the refuse of manufactories, these are the causes which lead to the blank days of the angler.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small ;
For the dear God that loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

WATERSIDE PLANTS.

IT is a true saying, that half the beauty of a thing is lost to those who do not know how to look for its beauty. The man who "knows when a thing pleases him and when it doesn't," is not the man to appreciate a good picture. In like manner, the man who has no more than a surface knowledge of the natural things about him, loses more than half the pleasure to be derived from a country ramble. He sees a general dash of colour : a blue, or red, or yellow flower, but nothing more :

A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose is to him,
And it is nothing more.

It is something, however, to know the names of the primroses, daisies, and other common flowers. The mere recognition of a score or so of flowers and shrubs increases the charm of a stroll over the meadows, and through the green lanes, and drives away the monotony

of a mere "constitutional." It is astonishing how little most people know of the lovely plants and flowers that meet their view every day in the country. Even though a man may be an excellent general naturalist, practical botany is, perhaps, the one study he has neglected. Doubtless the dryness of the technical part of the pursuit—the long names and the minute subdivisions—have something to do with it, but we think the *vastness* of the study has more. What is the use, one asks, of beginning when it is impossible ever to get near the end? There is a great deal in this, and we must confess that our own study of plants has been more with a view to understanding their artistic effects, as component parts of the landscape, than from a love of the abstruse and scientific part of the business. In that spirit, therefore, the following paper is written, and as our book is chiefly written for waterside wanderers, we shall confine ourselves to pointing out the more striking of the shrubs and flowers which meet the eye of the angler by lake or stream; and surely the angler, of all men, should know what there is to interest him when sport fails, and fish are not.

There are few streams whose waters do not reflect the graceful wands of the willow. By ornamental waters, the weeping willows droop their pensile branches; by sluggish, tortuous streams, the white

willows, crowned with a pollard-top, or grown into a more natural but somewhat ungainly tree, diversify the level landscape, and mark the course of the hidden river; in hedgerows, the palms, whose yellow clusters herald the grey foliage; and in marshy spots, the common osiers grow in fringed companies. The willow, in these its different species, is a well-known and prominent object. Well known! true; but how many know the number of species of willow that are more or less common in this country?—Five or six, of course. No, seventy, or thereabouts, be the same more or less, as our legal friends say. Certainly not less either, for the willow has a bewildering way of striking out an apparently new species now and then; a freak which may be very amusing to it, but gives no end of trouble to botanists.

The pollard-willow, with its stumpy, many-leaved head, has often afforded us concealment, as from its overhanging shelter we have fished for chub in the river reach below.

All the willows have a silvery-grey under surface to the leaves, and as the breeze sweeps down the river, the willows quiver and whiten as they proudly shake out their garments, while hypocritically bending away from the too-eagerly wooing wind.

Fairest of all the many-faced clan, is the goat willow, round-leaved sallow, or palm. When the “bleak

winds of March make us shudder and shiver," the long wands of the palm stand out stark and bronze by the steel-blue pools. Then the rich, red-brown buds open, and with silver-silken lustre the numerous catkins clothe the rods, so that the bushes become like white and shining clouds dropped upon the yellow-green fields. Then, when the primrose peeps, golden-eyed, from the old dead leaves and wind-laid brambles, the silver buds grow and deepen into gold, and the clustered rods shine brighter in the white spring sunlight than the yellowest hair of blue-eyed children.

The osier beds are great harbours of insect life, and "wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together," and so among the osiers tits, warblers, and other birds congregate and nest.

The dark-green fringe of the alder covers the margin of many a pool and river ; sometimes, where banks are narrow, giving a gloomy look to the scene, but at times beautifying, with the richness and picturesque solidity of its foliage, what would otherwise be a flat and dreary plain ; but the foliage is too heavy to wave much in the wind, and this lack of motion gives it a sullen look at times. A quiet curve and bay, with alders drooping over it, and a willow in the corresponding promontory ! How often have we admired a scene formed of such simple elements, while our loaded pike-bait clove the deep water, or our roach-

float calmly glided past. Many a river in our more level counties, which is now picturesque and lovely, would, if deprived of its willows and alders, be but a sluggish, uninteresting canal. The glossy leaves of the alder are not so pleasant to the touch as those of most other trees. They are harsh and sticky, and this is a drawback where they are numerous and one has to push through them. Alder-wood is one of the best for making that "villanous saltpetre," and it is good for wood-carving and turning. It has, when cut, a pale, flesh-coloured tint, which takes polish well. Under water, as piles, it is almost indestructible.

The alder has another recommendation—it retains its foliage far on into the winter.

Wandering up the banks of a wooded burn one comes sometimes on an open marshy glade, where the sunshine falls hot and a delicious incense fills the air. The grateful fragrance comes from that sober-tinted shrub, two to three feet in height, and with lanceolate, yellow-green leaves, which grows in abundance within a small space. It is the sweet gale, or bog myrtle. Walk through it, crush the scented essence out of the leaves, and mark how strong the odour is.

Out of the marshy side of the Mere the king of ferns, the *Osmunda regalis*, rears its stately head, growing four or six feet high, and giving a tropical richness to the marsh.

On those banks of gravel which often form the inner portion of a river curve, the butterbur has its home. When the sallows are silver and golden, you may see projecting out of the ground, thick, pink, fleshy spikes or stems. These are the flower-clusters of the butterburs, which make their appearance long before the huge, rhubarb-shaped leaves. In the summer the leaves (the largest of all those of our native plants) crowd thickly together, and it is difficult to push one's way through them, for they are stiff and strong. They form an attractive feature in the landscape, hiding, as they do, all the barren spots. Under the shelter of the roof of its leaves, and between the pillars of its stems, the water-fowl feed and take refuge. We are very fond of the butterbur, because of its size and sturdy strength, and its picturesque effect in brook scenery. Its roots extend rapidly and send up shoots here and there. Where it has seized upon some bit of marshy meadow-ground, as it sometimes does, and gains a headway, it is most difficult to eradicate.

The queen of the meadows, and not of the meadows alone, but the woodland glades and the shady lanes, is in our eyes the feathery, fragrant meadowsweet. It is not by any means exclusively a waterside plant, but as it is most abundant in the fertile "haughs" by the river-side, it may well be included in this chapter. In July and August its white blossoms, green-tinged and

creamy, quiver in crowded clusters in the summer air. Amid the crowd of gaudy blossoms, which at this time burst upon our ken, the meadowsweet looks pure and ethereal—a lily among scarlet roses, sweet seventeen by the side of painted forty. Often the angler wades knee-deep through it, as it spreads its summer snow by the streamlet ; and light as snow-flakes, and as graceful in texture, are its tiny blossoms. In the dew-wet night it gleams ghost-like in the margin of the wood, and loads the gloaming with its sweet, yet heavy odour. It dances in the morning breeze, and nods gaily at its distorted reflection in the rippling lake, and the deer inhale its almond scent as they come down to drink. It is a tender and delicate plant, and dies soon after it is plucked, so, grasp it not, but pass your hand lightly through its blossoms, and provoke it to a greater fragrance.

In the spring the “wild marsh-marigold shines like fire in swamp and hollow grey ;” the water-crowfoot lifts its white blossoms over every pool, or slow-moving stream ; in the marshy meadows the cardamine, or lady’s-smock, makes its appearance in abundance. Its pink-white flowers are so fresh and pleasant, as they nod over the old-year’s grass and sprouting flags, that it is a great favourite of ours, and we welcome its appearance like that of the primrose and violet.

Everyone knows the daffodil :—

A host of golden daffodils
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze,
Continuous as the stars that shine
And tumble in the milky way,
They stretched, in never-ending line,
Along the margin of a bay ;
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance !

sings Wordsworth, and be sure his eye rested with pleasure on the golden carpet the daffodil spreads in the marshy, meadow hollows.

Where mountain streams struggle through long, green moss, the small, yellow umbels of the golden saxifrage, and its yellow-green leaves straggle through the wet moss like a stream of gold, shining in bright contrast to the vivid green of its mossy cushion.

In June and July the margin of our rivers is in many places made most beautiful by the handsome, purple loosestrife—a plant with a long, narrow leaf, and tall, tapering spikes, a foot long, of rich purplish-red flowers, on a stem two to four feet high.

In most meadows the silver-weed presents to our notice its large, yellow, velvety flowers, growing close to the creeping stem and pinnated leaves, which, in large masses, shine silvery with the silken down on the under surface of the leaves.

The forget-me-not has fame enough for its loveliness and its pretty name, and no flower would be more missed than this, were it never more to gleam blue and bright from the lush vegetation of the water-edges. It has, nevertheless, rivals by the waterside that run it hard, and of its own colour and semblance. One of these is the brooklime, a common plant, in flower all the summer, and bearing bright blue flowers on a stout, juicy stem, about a foot high, with thick, dark-green leaves. In the water, among the roots of the iris and reeds, it does its best to rival its more graceful neighbour the forget-me-not.

Where there are large marshes, many acres are often covered with the snowy white cotton-grasses. It seems a pity the silky globes cannot be utilised for some purpose, but, in the meantime, we are well content to see the marsh flooded with their silver overflow, and shining in the sunlight. Growing in the water, on the borders of slow streams with gravelly bottoms, and in the shallows of lakes, one often sees that singular plant the mare's-tail. It has an erect and jointed stem, growing ten or twelve inches above the surface; its leaves are linear, or narrow and grass-like, and grow in whorls at intervals up the stem. It is easily pulled to pieces at the joints. Besides its singularity and picturesqueness of appearance, it is said to be of use in purifying stagnant water, and absorbing the inflammable air.

Cats like the great wild valerian, if nobody else does. Its powerful scent has a great attraction for them, and they will roll in the leaves, and smell, and grow almost frantic with excitement; and if anyone were to put a small piece in his pocket, the shyest pussy would court his company. The valerian is one of the most conspicuous of the plants which grow on the river borders, standing, as it does, from three to four feet high, and with large clusters of pale, pink flowers. Its powerful scent is decidedly unpleasant when close, and, in its case, distance is certainly required to add enchantment to the smell; but as an item of scenery, it is of value, and its presence enlivens many a rushy-margined stream.

Watercress gatherers should beware not to gather by mistake the marshwort, or fool's watercress. The general appearance of the plant is similar to that of the watercress, from which, however, its more pointed and serrated leaves, its umbelliferous growth of small, white flowers, and the hollow stem, serve to distinguish it. It flowers during July and August.

In July and August, the pale, lilac flowers of the water capitate-mint cluster in shallow water and fringe the islets. The flowers grow in dense whorls at the summit of the stem, which rises from egg-shaped leaves.

Of those weeds which grow in the water, the ana-

charis has pushed itself to the chief place. Plague upon it! it is filling up all our rivers, canals, and lakes, spoiling our fishing and spoiling our tempers. We have not a good word to say for it. We deny it any kind of beauty, and we wish it far away. That thick green scum, which so often clothes piles and woodwork in the water with its dark, clinging mass, is the crowsilk. It is said to be a good bait for roach, but we have never had sufficient faith to try it. The duck-weeds and pond-weeds are known to every one by sight, but it is not every one who knows how interesting and singular a close examination discovers them to be.

Now we come to a number of plants which are noticeable chiefly for their size. In July and August the aromatic odour of the hemp agrimony greets us in moist woods, and by the river margins. It is a tall and conspicuous plant, but it certainly has no pretensions to good looks. Its dense clusters of small flesh-coloured flowers are supported on many-branched stems, three and four feet high. The water-dropwort is common enough in all ditches. Its umbels of flowers are greenish-white, its stems are hollow, and it bears angular fruits as large as marbles.

The hemlock water-dropwort also forces itself upon our attention by its size. It grows to three and five feet in height, and on its much-branched stem it bears

large, broad, glossy leaflets, and large umbels of white flowers, which appear in July. It is very poisonous. Of a similar size is the common comfrey, which has large, strongly-veined leaves, and clusters of white, or greenish, or pinkish, drooping bell-like flowers. Its stem and foliage are thickly beset with bristles.

Every winter fisherman must have caught his line in a certain tall bush, with rigid and dry stems, which when broken are found to be quite hollow. These are the dead plants of the water-figwort, a large and ugly plant, with indented, dull green leaves, and clusters of purplish-brown flowers. The great water-dock, with its long leaves drooping from its tall stem, is not ungraceful in its effect among the sedges and rushes.

What a bright bit of colour the yellow flower of the iris, or yellow water-flag, presents on the summit of its sword-shaped, glossy green leaf-stems; while in the quiet pools beneath it, the beautiful white and yellow water-lilies sleep away the lazy day, and close their flowers and sink under the surface of the water as the gloaming deepens. A liliated bay of a large lake is a very lovely sight, both when the lilies expand their largest and shine their brightest on the mirror-like water in the blaze of a summer's noonday sun, or when they dance merrily on the wavelets, when the north-west wind blows, and the large leaves curl over and expose their grey undersides. The black coots and

water-hens paddle about through the snow-white lilies, and are capital foils to their loveliness and simplicity. We are very fond of the aroma of the water-lily, but we have met people who much dislike it. It is well to drop one's float in the spaces between the lily leaves, for big perch often take shelter under the broad leaves from the glare of the sun. Side by side with the water-lilies is often seen a pretty and showy plant with a dense egg-shaped spike of pink flowers rising above the water, on which the lanceolate leaves repose. This plant rejoices in the long name of amphibious persea. It is very common in the Shropshire Meres. Very rare, but very elegant, is a plant called the water lobelia, which grows in some mountain tarns and in the Cumberland and Westmoreland lakes, where the surface in places is closely carpeted with its matted leaves. It has clusters of light blue flowers, drooping from a stem a foot high.

Very arrow-like must be the plant which bears the English name of arrowhead and the Latin name of *Sagittaria sagittifolia*, and its leaves are indeed very arrow-shaped. Quiet pools and bays of rivers are often carpeted with the large, bright leaves, from which in July and August rise whorls of pretty white flowers on a stalk seven or eight inches above the water.

Amid the rushes the water plantain grows tall and large, with delicate, small, rose-coloured flowers; and

below, among the lilies, the kidney-shaped leaves and white three-petalled flower of the frogbit may often be seen.

These are but a few of the commoner flowers and plants which meet the eye of the angler on his water-side rambles; and they are pleasant pictures enough, severally and collectively set as they are in a framework of waving rushes of many kinds, reeds brown and feathery, bur-reeds with clustered fruits, and reed mace and bulrush with purple and substantial heads. Colour, beauty, motion, lightness, elegance—these are the elements of the picture of which these water-side plants are the canvas and the paints.

BREAM FISHING.

IT is a land of deep rivers flowing with quiet current through miles of marsh and by broad lagoons, whose banks are fringed with reeds. Three rivers, a score of shallow meres, locally called "broads," and deep, slowly-moving dykes, combine to make this eastern county a very attractive one for the angler and the naturalist. Those who have been in Norfolk will not fail to recognise the *locale* of the spot we describe. Twenty miles and more inland from the coast stretches a wide, flat tract of country, through which the rivers Bure, Yare, and Waveney flow with sinuous courses to unite at Breydon Water, and debouch into the sea by the quaint semi-Dutch town of Great Yarmouth. The Yare, the chiefest of the rivers, carries the traffic of the ancient city of Norwich to the sea. The Waveney, the clearest of the rivers, runs from the little town of Beccles on [the south of the Yare; and the Bure passes by the pretty village of Wroxham

and the beautiful "broad" of that ilk, and many others, on the north.

Along the course of these rivers, and generally communicating with them by narrow reed-fringed channels, are the sheets of water known as "broads."

It may be imagined that such an extent of water must harbour many fish, and the surmise would be correct. The chief products are bream and pike. The pike are getting scarcer, owing to the great prevalence of the practice of "liggering," as setting trimmers is called in Norfolk, and the indiscriminate netting of under-sized fish. This unwise mode of fishing has had another necessary, though unfortunate, step; that is, the closing or preserving of many of the "broads," so that the vast expanses of water which were formerly alive with fishermen, are now silent and lonely, save for the clamour of the wild fowl; and the middle-class angler is bereft of his pleasure.

The bream, on the contrary, are as numerous as ever, and the Norfolk angler counts his catch, not by the pound weight, but by the stone. Fishing for bream may be said to be an institution of Norfolk, and, to judge by the numbers of London men who annually visit the Yare, at Reedham and Coldham, its fame has spread wide.

It was our lot to go straight from a trout-fishing county in the west, to a residence for some time in Norfolk, and,

while we fully appreciated the advantages of that county for those who were fond of yachting in the summer and pike fishing in the autumn and winter, yet we looked with great contempt upon bream fishing. We had never seen a bream but once, and that was while we were perch fishing in Shropshire, and hooked a large, white, bellows-like fish, which broke away, leaving us to guess that it was a bream ; and we disdained to angle for fish that were reputed to be so slimy that we had to take hold of them with a cloth when captured, and so uneatable that they were only fit for manure. We remember, too, that we felt a repugnance to fishing in such sluggish waters, after throwing a fly on the sparkling, dashing rivers and streams of Wales. For weeks we went about with a moping air, like a kitten in a strange house, longing for the sound of rushing water and the glint and dazzle of a cascade, so wearisome was the smooth, oily flow of the level waters. But at last, when the memory of the salmon pools and the grayling fords began to fade, we grew more content, and soon we discovered that there was a singular beauty in the slow, wide rivers and the flat far-reaching marshes. And it was a cruise we had down the Yare and up the Bure, and a little bream fishing by the way, that completed our conversion; and this is how it came about.

Two of us hired a boat, a tiny large-sailed thing, with a centre-board, and a fast sailer, although somewhat ticklish to handle. We provisioned her well, particularly in the matter of bottled beer and tobacco ; and we took care to have plenty of fishing tackle with us. We started from Norwich with a light breeze, which wafted us gently along at a steady pace. With our large sail set we glided along with the ease of a dream, at first between trees whose leaves danced merrily in the summer wind, and then between drooping willows, shivering and paling with the gentle violence of the zephyrs even as the water below trembled and whitened with the ripples. On we went with softest motion, the bow of the boat parting the water tenderly, and leaving two long wave-lines diverging and retreating from our troubled wake. The yellow iris flower shone in the long, green ranks of the tall flags, the bulrush bowed its head of regal purple, and the reedmace shook its plumes on either side of us, and then we were out upon the marshes, which stretched as far as eye could reach, yet it was not by any means a monotonous picture. The marsh itself was beautiful. Here a tract of white cotton-grass, there a patch of yellow, all around greys, and browns, and reds, and greens mingled in wonderful harmony, and varying inconceivably in tint as the shadows of the cloudlets floated over the luxuriant marsh grasses, and the wind swayed them in billowy

undulations. There was light and motion everywhere; not the jarring motion of a crowd in a street, but the silent mystic motion of the northern lights in a winter sky. The red and white cattle lay and stood in picturesque groups, or waded knee-deep in the grass with bent-down heads and lazily-switching tails. Windmills whirled their great arms over the far-reaching plain, and ever and anon we passed a clump of trees, in the midst of which nestled a small farmhouse or inn, with a broad, flat ferry-boat lying by the river bank.

All down here the river is banked up on either side, so that the level of the river surface is actually higher than the dykes which drain the marsh into it. Hence at the end of each important drain there is a small windmill, which works a pump, and so lifts the water from the marsh into the river.

The prettiest feature, however, in the whole scene is the presence of numbers of yachts and wherries. The former with their snow-white sails, and the latter with their huge brown or black ones, look very singular indeed in the distance, for, low down as we are, the river is invisible, and the vessels seem tacking and sailing about in the marsh itself.

The day wore on, and at intervals we passed small boats moored by the bank, the occupants of which were fishing for bream and roach.

“By the shade of Walton! but they look very

happy and comfortable yonder ; and they seem to be taking some heavy fish."

"We must try bream fishing ourselves, for, after all, it doesn't seem such bad fun ; but then, under such a sky and on such a day, any kind of fishing is idyllic in its appearance."

Presently the breeze died out as the sunlight softened into the evening shades, and we floated listlessly as far as Coldham Hall, a riverside inn, surrounded by tall poplars. We landed here with the intention of staying the night, and moored our boat to the staith. Our curiosity was at once aroused by the sight of a large pair of scales, suspended from a cross bar between two poplar trees. Upon entering the inn, we found a supper ready laid, that betokened the expectation of many guests and the satisfying of mighty appetites. We had evidently fallen upon our feet, as the saying is, and our stomachs rejoiced at the sight of the good things. But, the reason, the reason? we inquired ; and then we learned that there was a fishing match, and that nearly thirty boats were out engaged in competing for the prizes. Each boat was allowed three rods, and all of them were down the river, a mile away. The match must be over now. Aye ! there they come ; and looking down the long, shining stretch of river, we saw them coming back in a pretty compact body of black dots. In advance of them was a yacht, with all canvas set

and boomed out, gliding on like a ghost, impelled by some faint lingerings of the breeze that caught her lofty topsails. Out of the dull, grey east she came, with wings outspread, as if in haste to reach the sunset west; and behind her, with dull, material motion, were the fishers' boats, lightening the grey river with the flash of their oardips.

The yacht reached her anchorage in a little lagoon off the river amid the poplars, through the branches of which her red pennant fluttered. The boats came up and the crews landed, each man with a heavy load of silver-scaled roach and bream. Then we saw the use of the big scales. Amid the greatest interest and anxiety, and a vast amount of talk and argument, the various takes were weighed and noted. The winning boat had taken more than ten stone weight, chiefly of bream, and the largest fish was four pounds. The fish were then spread out on the grass, and a goodly show they made. We were permitted to join the fishermen at the festive meal which afterwards ensued, and we can safely say that we never before or since heard such wonderful angling stories, or met with such apparently skilful anglers. The class of men who composed the assemblage rather puzzled us. Many of them seemed to be small tradesmen, but the majority were of a lower class; but what their occupations might be when at home we could not guess—artisans of

some kind, with an affectation of the sportsman in their dress, which gave them a nondescript look. They were capital fellows, though, and we spent a merry evening with them, and imbibed no end of angling lore.

What surprised us much was that they should have had such good sport, seeing that during the night a terrific thunderstorm came on with torrents of rain. Standing at the door, and gazing at the brilliant light and the intense darkness which in quick recurrence overspread the marsh, and listening to the savage crack and heavy roll of the thunder, and the hissing of the rain on the river, we thought we had never seen such a storm. The tide, which "backs" the water of the Yare as far as Norwich, had risen to a favourable height for bream fishing, our informant told us, and for two or three hours the fish had bitten as fast as possible. When the tide is right, and the big bream do come on the feed, the catches are often almost incredible in weight and number, and the largest fish appear to be caught where the water is slightly brackish.

We fished ourselves the whole of the next day, and although it was *after rain*, neither we nor any of the other half-dozen boats out caught more than a dozen small ones each.

A few days afterwards we found ourselves sailing up the Bure, hastening to keep an appointment to

meet some friends, and have a day's bream fishing near Ranworth Broad. We had hoped to reach Ranworth that night, but the wind died away towards evening, (as it usually does in the summer time; and long before we reached Acle we had to take to our oars. The darkness came on too, and we had rather a weary pull ere we reached Acle Bridge. While rowing along in the deep gloaming we saw several floats of wood on the surface of the water. We at once jumped to the conclusion that some poacher had been at work setting night lines, and with a laudable desire to frustrate his evil designs, we attempted to haul the supposed lines in. Fortunately for ourselves we could not move the weight at the bottom, for the pieces of wood turned out to be the floats of the eel nets which are nightly set in the river by persons who make a regular trade of it, and whose take that night we might have spoiled. We did not guess what the floats were, however, until we came to a turn in the river, where, on the bank, a mysterious framework rose from the rushes, and there loomed against the olive sky the large circles of the eel nets which were hung up to dry.

The next day we sped before a pleasant breeze swiftly up to Ranworth. We were to meet our friends at an inn on the banks of the adjacent Broad, and turning up a wide channel we ran between lofty reeds,

between the stems of which the coots and waterhens swam and nodded their heads, and the reedwren suspended its purse-like nest. We could see the Broad every now and then through narrow openings on our left, and as we seemed to be running parallel to it we conceived the idea of taking a short cut. Entering one of the narrow channels, we steered boldly for the open water which appeared to be only a hundred yards off. The passage presently dwindled away, and we found ourselves charging the reeds and forcing a passage through them. With the way we had on the boat, and the wind dead aft, it seemed as if we should succeed in our endeavour; and as we passed along, the reeds parted in front of us and bowed down right and left with a steady, rushing sound; but one of us was an ornithologist, and as we passed a small hillock, a bird like a landrail, but smaller, flew up. The lover of birds rushed frantically to the mast, and, loosing the halyard, let the sail down with a run, careless whether the sail went into the water, or the yard hit us on the head.

"It was a water-rail," was his excuse; "and there is its nest."

Sure enough there its nest was, like a waterhen's in build, and containing four or five eggs, smaller and lighter in colour than a landrail's.

"There, that is a prize. Never mind the wet sails;

and I'll push you out with the oars, if you will hoist the sail."

That was all very well, but it took us a good half-hour ere we reached the blue water of the open Broad.

An hour afterwards we were moored in a bay of the river. There were four of us, so there was not much room for movement in the boat. We had a sack of grains as ground-bait, and we threw plenty of it in. Then we set to work, two of us with the old-fashioned red worm, and the other two with a paste, coloured red with Judson's dye. One seemed to be as efficacious as the other, but a rather singular circumstance happened to one of the paste fishers. He was a very big, portly man, and he caught nothing but the smallest fish. While the rest of us were pulling out fine fellows of two and three pounds in weight, he continued catching tiny ones, not six inches long. He lost his temper somewhat at last, and it certainly was rather trying, especially as his companions were proficient in the art of chaff. Not a minute elapsed without one or other of us having a bite. And then, if it happened to be a good-sized fish, it was held at the top of the water, while a landing-net was slipped under it. Some of the larger ones gave a few vigorous dashes, but as a rule they give but little play.

We had a cloth in which to hold the fish, while we

took the hook out, but notwithstanding this precaution, we were soon covered with the white, sticky slime which covers the bream as with a garment. We soon gave up counting the fish we caught, and we should scarcely be believed, out of Norfolk, if we gave the estimated number and weight we ultimately caught.

In itself, bream fishing is the most unromantic kind of sport, but the surroundings gave it an adventitious charm. The river was broad and clear, the green flags and reeds bowed in the wind with a pleasant sighing ; the great red valerian grew on the bank and scented the air with its agreeable odour ; the snipe hung in the blue sky like a lark, and the sound of its "drumming" or "bleating" floated about us, like the voice of a ventriloquist ; a hawk, probably a marsh harrier, swept over us, stilling the song of the reed-wrens and the twitter of the bearded tits. Yachts glided by with all canvas set ; wherries rushed past with the white foam spurting up at their bows, and their great sails flapped thunderously as they gybed or tacked at each twist of the river.

With all these sights and sounds about us, the fish biting merrily, the sun warm and the breeze cool, we enjoyed our bream fishing amazingly, and felt sorry when the sun sank in the crimson west, and the river grew black in the gloaming.

One word of caution to the bream fisher : moor

your boat on the *concave* side of a bend, and not on the convex. The wherries are often compelled to "shave" the corners, or lose the wind, and tack, and it is a pity to give them the trouble and delay of doing this, for as a rule they do all they can to oblige the angler.

RAIN.

THE two great enemies of the angler are the east wind and the drought, and the latter is the worse of the two ; for, though the former makes the fish shy of biting, yet that is not so bad as having no water to fish in. When the rivers are low and clear, the salmon-fisher is in despair, and as his holiday slips away with day after day of dry weather, he begins to feel the most miserable man in creation. He knows that numbers of salmon are waiting in the estuary, or in the lower pools of the river, for the water to come down in a spate, so that they may make a straight run up to their spawning grounds, but nothing larger than a small parr can go up the fords, over which the water trickles in decreasing volume. And those fish that are in the pools, trout included, grow shy and suspicious, as their liberty is circumscribed by the narrowing banks, and they are crowded against their fellows.

The trout-fisher has this advantage over the salmon-

fisher: he can seek out some shaded burn, and there practise the mode of fishing described in our paper, "The Linn," a method which, however killing in small burns, is very uncertain of success in wide rivers.

A drought! What a picture the word represents—a sky blue in the summit of its arc, and a dull grey where it clasps the panting earth in its misty girdle. There is no clear defined line in the horizon; the woods lose themselves in haze; the hills are less substantial than clouds; and when out to seaward you look at a low, straight line, taking it to be the limit of the visible sea, you are astonished at seeing a vessel sailing along far above it, apparently in the air. The sunshine is a blinding glare, pervading every nook and corner of the parched and dusty landscape. There is the maximum of sunshine and the minimum of shade; the grass is burned off the brown hill-side, and even the grass-hoppers are too lazy to jump and too hot to chirp. The foliage of the trees acquires a dull, dead tint of green, and the leaves droop and curl, thereby letting wider sun-shafts strike the glades below, that should be soft and moist, but are hard and dry.

The river-beds are great tracts of white stones, simply darkened as with varnish where the water trickles over them, but none the less visible, so transparent is the stream. Like as a skater upon clear ice, seeing the deep holes over which he glides, and the

masses of waving weeds below him, deems the ice to be thinner than it really is, and is more apprehensive of danger, so do the trout in this preternaturally clear water see evil even where none exists. They have the same feeling of insecurity as a sailor would have in a ship with a glass bottom, or a nymph sleeping in a satyr-haunted wood. If a rod be waved over the stream the fish dart away with the greatest expedition.

We remember one exception to this shyness of the trout during a drought. A big trout had taken up its position in a wide part of the canal which runs through the charming vale of Llangollen. Its weight was over four pounds, and it was regularly besieged by anglers who tried for it with all sorts of bait, but it took no notice of them, and went on feeding and swimming about in a circumscribed spot without evincing the slightest fear of its many visitors. A friend of ours, yclept Jones, was determined to catch this trout, and after many failures, he grew desperate, and resolved to fish for it through the night, as a last chance of catching it off its guard. The sun went down and the dark came on; and minnow, worm, and fly had been tried in vain. The night was a dark one, and Jones mounted a huge, white moth, and sent it to where he imagined the fish to be, but he found that he had got his line fast in the branches of the bushes that grew on the opposite side of the canal.

He tugged and pulled, but he could not loosen it. He did not wish to break his line, and he fancied he could see his white moth dangling a short distance above the water. He sat down on the brink to consider, and lit his pipe. It was very warm and still, and he fell into a doze, in a very insecure position. His pipe fell into the water and went out with a fizz, without arousing him; then he heard a loud splash, and no wonder, for he had fallen into the water. He scrambled out again, dripping wet, and missed his rod, which had lain across his knees. As he was wet through, he waded through the canal to unfasten his line, but to his astonishment he found that had gone too. Then he heard a sound some distance off which he well knew. It was the sound of the line being rapidly run off a check reel. Running along the bank he was able to distinguish his rod moving along the water at a good pace. He dashed in and seized it, and after a long and arduous fight he succeeded in landing the big trout, which had sprung up at his fly as it dangled over the water.

Nor is it on running streams alone that the drought has such an effect. The lakes and pools lower, and their muddy margins emit unhealthy vapours. The tench and the carp nose about the surface of the water, gasping with their leathery mouths. The pike hangs motionless, though you work your gudgeon to his very

nose ; the perch swim in scornful circles round your worm ; and the little roach jump and play around your float. Only the leaves of the water-lilies and the arrow-heads look cool and green, and the water rises in a ledge around the edge of each, as if wishful, yet afraid, to overflow it.

But this is all about drought, not rain. True, but we describe the subject of our paper by antitheses. But do you wish for rain ? then, see, the haze is lifting from the weather-gleam, the distant woods assume a shape, the hills stand out bold and clear, sound travels far, the flies are doubly annoying, they seem to sting where they alight upon your flesh. The gnats throng close to the earth and the swallows follow them ; the dust eddies in the roads, and the birds shake themselves and twitter in the bushes. The clouds gather, a silence falls over all. Pat, comes the first drop, and then down it comes, the blessed rain. The leaves of the trees expand and shake under the downpour, the branches sway and bend under the beating drops, and there is a sound through the woods as of a mighty wind.

How beautiful is the rain,
After the dust and heat ;
In the broad and fiery street,
In the narrow lane,
How beautiful is the rain !

How it clatters along the roofs,
Like the tramp of hoofs ;

How it gushes and struggles out,
From the throat of the overflowing spout !
Across the window pane
It pours and pours,
 And swift and wide,
 With a muddy tide,
Like a river down the gutter pours
 The rain, the welcome rain !

The sick man from his chamber
Looks at the twisted brooks ;
He can feel the cool
Breath of each little pool ;
His fevered brain
Grows calm again,
And he breathes a blessing on the rain.

In the country on every side,
Where far and wide,
Like a leopard's tawny and spotted hide,
Stretches the plain,
To the dry grass and the drier grain,
 How welcome is the rain !

The brooks rise and lose their transparency, and presently rush down in a yellow flood to the rivers, which ere long renew their strength, and roll majestically between their receding banks. The country springs at a bound from death to life. The fresh greenness of the vegetation is a positive delight. The air is cool and laden with the life-giving incense which rises from the steaming plants, and all nature is grateful for the relief brought by the welcome rain.

Now, too, is the time when the rustic angler is in his glory. His hazel bough and coarse line are as

effective in the muddy waters as the most finished appliances of the wealthy angler. A worm dug out of a manure heap is as killing as any bait ever devised, and it will go hard with our rustic angler if he catch not a fair dish of trout for his supper. If the stream is unpreserved, every likely hole has its visitor, and many are the trout who have no reason to bless the oncoming of the rain.

Birds, beasts, fishes, and man welcome the rain in summer, but in the colder months of the year, ah! it is altogether a different story. We write now in the month of November, and we have had four weeks of almost incessant rain. We have tried to drill ourselves into a cheerful state of mind, but as one swallow does not make a summer, so all our writing has not persuaded us that this present rain is of the same nature as summer rain.

The day is cold, and dark, and dreary,
It rains, and the wind is never weary;
The vine still clings to the mouldering wall,
But at every gust the dead leaves fall,
And the day is dark and dreary.

We have need of all our philosophy, yet—

Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary.

A RUSTIC ANGLER.

THE art of angling does not seem to flourish among the lower classes in the country. Your true labouring man is not, as a rule, either a lover of nature or a follower of the gentle craft. When labourers are boys, they will fish in noisy companies by some pool-side ; and sad it is to see them, for their language is foul and their voices discordant. The rustic youth is not, as a rule, by any means a fine specimen of human nature. He has not the quickness and intelligence of the town boy, neither has he any perception of the beautiful about him. Hence, as the raw material is seldom the stuff of which anglers are made, it is not wonderful that the finished product should seldom pass his days by the river-side, and enjoy the “innocent and calm recreation,” which seems so peculiarly suitable for a country life. Perhaps it is that the dull monotony of his daily labour so deadens his perceptive faculties that he cannot see pleasure in angling ; but sees a great deal in leaning on a gate, or drinking bad beer in the

public-house. The case is somewhat different with the corresponding class in our towns. Town-life gives a greater activity of mind and intelligence of purpose, and there is, by the law of contrast, a greater stimulus to seek fresh air and freedom in country rambles and fishing excursions.

When the rustic is an angler, however, he is generally a character well worth knowing. He has a store of practical wisdom, is full of old sayings, quaint and pregnant with meaning; is weatherwise, and knows something of birds and beasts; perhaps has studied botany, especially as connected with the art of healing; and finally has a simple, quiet way with him, which is very attractive.

It is easy to sketch his picture.

A thunder-cloud is creeping over the small village that nestles, red-roofed and picturesque, in a typical English valley, blotting out the bright blue sky and shading the farmyard, so that the frightened fowls run under the hay-ricks to be out of danger.

The village street is deserted, save for two dogs standing panting at opposite door-ways. Look in at one of the windows, in which are a few articles that betoken that there resides the village cobbler. By the open window the cobbler sits, with his last upon his knee, and hammering away as if he thought of nothing but business in the world. He is a man of

middle height, thin and bent, not with any great age, for he is only fifty, but through the nature of his calling. His hair is grey, and somewhat straggling and curly. As he hammers away, his brow is bent and his look troubled, as if the fate of a great speculation hung in the balance. But he is simply thinking whether he can get the boots done by the evening, and if, when they are finished and taken home to the old dame at the post-office, he might ask for payment for them then ; for he is short of cash at present, and his good wife has been reminding him of it. He has been dunned for a sum of 3s. 10½*d.*, and threatened with a County Court summons by a short-tempered tradesman, and it is not convenient just at this time to pay it. Business has been very slack—country boots and shoes don't wear out in the summer ; and if they did, they don't let in the wet and cold, simply because there is no wet and cold to let in, and children at least can go bare-footed. Then, if he asks his present customer for immediate payment, he would lose her custom, for she would consider that her credit was doubted. True, the cobbler could find a friend to lend him the money, but then he has a soul above borrowing, and is a proud man ; and so it is that he is distressed in mind, while the thunder-cloud is blotting out the sunshine.

The shadow crosses his window-pane, and the large drops patter on the dusty road. The cobbler looks

suddenly up from his work, and as he sees the increasing downpour, the troubled expression vanishes from off his face, and a cheery, kindly smile illumines it.

"Ha! ha! I said so last night. I saw the look of the sky!" he exclaims, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "After this the fish will bite. There has been a drought for the last three weeks, and not a fish could I catch, but after this I will have some fine sport."

He goes to the door and stands, with his legs wide apart and his hands in his pockets, surveying with increasing delight the leaden sky and the wide road, which is now covered with rushing streams of water. He is neglecting his work, and he knows it, yet for the life of him he cannot help it. If his wife saw him she would scold him well for his idleness, for she is a thrifty soul, and has little sympathy with her husband's recreation. He has no fear of her now, for the flashing lightning and the crashing thunder have driven her to the darkest corner of the kitchen, where she sits with her apron over her head, trembling mightily.

While her husband thinks of the angling to come, he muses also on the angling that is past. Clearly enough, though with a tender halo about them, the scenes of his boyhood come before him. His father was a labourer, struggling hard to keep his large family upon nine shillings a week. As a boy he was more delicate and weakly than his companions, but then he

enjoyed himself more, because, while they cared nothing for the country, and longed to be in a distant town, he loved the country for its own sake, and felt a pleasure he was unable to analyse in the contact and companionship of the trees and the birds and the beasts. A canal ran near where he lived, and at a very early age he angled in it, with a hazel-stick for a rod, and a crooked pin for a hook, catching occasionally a gudgeon, a small roach, or a ruffe. Then he set his heart upon a real rod and line, such as the gentlemen fishermen used, but not so expensive. His mother was willing to gratify his wish, of course; and by dint of saving a penny now and a penny then, and by going without a new gown, which she sadly needed, she managed to buy him a cheap rod and line. From that time forward he was an angler, and as his love for the pastime grew, so did his knowledge of the true and the beautiful.

Thenceforth he was above the grosser vices of his coevals; thenceforth he grew up a man superior to his fellows, and rose so much above them as to become a tradesman in a small way on his own account.

It is fishing which has made life happy for him.

He married young, and he was fond of his wife, but she does not enter into or understand his tastes, and so he leads a separate life, as it were, into which he retires when things go wrong, or his wife is cross.

With his small wants and his unselfish nature, the

past has been a happy time in spite of its hardships and struggles, and as he thinks of it lovingly and half regretfully, the rain ceases, the clouds part, and show a more brilliant blue in their rifts than there was before. The cobbler seizes his rod from the corner, and a bag of worms from a nail in the back kitchen, and, paying a deaf ear to the remonstrances of his wife, he sallies forth to his favourite spot ; and there behold him, as he sits on a fallen log, watching his float twirl in the golden eddies. The spot he has chosen is a good one, and is also prettily situated. The river is a navigable one, and its water is dammed up at intervals by means of locks. Just below one of these the fisherman sits. Above the lock the river flows wide and deep, and between banks heavily fringed with willows, which are green or silvery as the breeze shakes the upper or the under side of the long narrow leaves into view. Their branches trail in the water, which is tinged yellow with the rain.

The river narrows suddenly to the lock, which is an old massive structure, black and moss-stained. Below the lock is a deep pool, and it is on the bank of this that the rustic fisherman takes his seat, on the yellow-ringed stump of a sawn tree, close under the lower gate of the lock. Through the crevices of the gate the water spouts in jets, which, near the top, are bright as mother-of-pearl, flashing in the sun, and lower down

are tinged with gold, which shines in strong contrast to the jet of the dripping timber.

From a subaqueous sluice the water pours and bubbles in its haste to join the eddies which whirl about the lower pool, widening and circling more slowly as the distance increases from the floodgate.

Behind the angler rises a sloping sward of green, broken only by the soft, grey trunks of numerous beech trees, until it reaches the oak-crowned ridge of the hill. In the autumn this beech slope presents a wonderful maze of colours. The bright yellow and scarlet of the dying foliage above, and the more sober red and brown of the beech mast on the ground, burn and glow like a stormy sunset. It is no less beautiful now. The massive foliage of the trees is fresh and green after the rain. Every leaf holds a rain-drop, and every raindrop holds a morsel of light. The sun brightens the whole mass, so that the myriad diamond and emerald sparkles are toned down by quantity into a gleamy and quivering lustre.

The river rushes on through the fair English landscape, by bowery woods and coppiced hills, by nestling villages and undulating parks; but nowhere does it pass a happier or more contented man than the cobbler, who sits watching his float as it is carried this way and that way by the conflicting streams.

It is almost needless to say that his bait is a worm. Rustic anglers rarely use any other. His rod is a home-made one, for he cannot afford to buy one equal to what he is now able to make. The bottom piece is of ash, the second joint is of hazel, and the top is made of a piece of lancewood, which once formed part of a gig-shaft.

He sits and fishes patiently, but, to his astonishment, he catches no fish save one little perch. After a while he guesses the cause. A pike must be prowling about, and must be got rid of before the smaller fish will bite. He puts his hand into his large pocket and pulls out a stout line, a large float, and a wooden reel with a sharp peg attached. He drives the peg into the ground, and lays the line down while he goes to a small pool in a meadow a couple of hundred yards away, where in a few minutes he succeeds in catching a small roach. With this he baits a live-bait hook. Then, throwing in this pike line, he goes patiently on with his fishing, and in less than a quarter of an hour the pike float disappears with a rush as a pike seizes the bait. He gives him plenty of time to gorge, for he has seen many a pike lost by striking too soon, while none are lost by giving them plenty of time. At last he lays down his pipe and takes up the set line. He hauls in the slack, and then, when he feels the line taut, he gives a slight strike to make sure;

and then, with little ceremony—for he does not believe in giving the fish too much play—he hauls in a pike of fully six pounds in weight. This is a stroke of luck which he did not expect, and he is pleased accordingly. Now that the tyrant of a pike is removed, the other fish begin to bite well. Every now and then the float gives a sharp dash with the bite of a perch, wriggles away with the slow bite of an eel, or slides away under the seductive influence of a chub or roach. If, in any interval between the bites, his mind is troubled with the thought of his present monetary embarrassments, the cloud is dissipated by the next movement of his float. Meanwhile, his good wife, when she discovers where he has gone, and that his work is unfinished, is growling and scolding at her husband in his absence. But as evening approaches she remembers that he left without his dinner, so she despatches the youngest of their children, a flaxen-haired, blue-eyed little thing, and her father's especial favourite, to him with bread and cheese and a bottle of beer.

This adds to the angler's happiness, and with his child by his side and a goodly pile of fish at his feet, "he cares for nobody, no, not he."

The long evening draws on towards dusk. The sun goes down, and the air is so clear that the blue of the western sky is scarce hidden by the pale pink

of the sunset flush. The air is full of a sleepy sound ; the hum of insects—of myriads of tiny wings vibrating in golden clouds ; the wood pigeons in the oak copse ; the cattle lowing in the meadows ; the splash and gurgle of the river ; and the rustling of the leaves in the wind which rose at sunset.

As he loiters slowly homeward through the glamour of the twilight he meets the clergyman of the parish, a man who is himself an angler, and is fond of doing a good deed in a quiet way. He asks the cobbler a few questions about his sport, and then insists upon buying the pike and a brace of the biggest perch of him for 5s. ; so the cobbler goes home with a light heart and a present which will appease his wife.

We confess to having very great sympathies with the rustic angler and his class, and we have drawn his portrait lovingly. Let the rich see this moral : don't, by over-preserving, close your rivers to the poor fellow, and so deprive him of his pleasure, and, what is of more importance, so valuable an aid to his moral well-being.

A MONSTER PIKE.

VERY few anglers are “all round” men—*i.e.*, devote themselves to the pursuit of all branches of angling alike. Most men cherish a liking for some particular branch of their art until it grows into a hobby. Thus we have the different classes of fly-fishers, bottom-fishers, salmon-fishers and trout-fishers, pike-fishers and roach-fishers, barbel-fishers and gudgeon-fishers—and each class stands by its favourite pursuit, and declares it to be the only true kind of angling. I can turn my hand to all these branches on occasion, and enjoy them all, but above all do I like pike-fishing. That is my hobby, and in that do I glory. I would rather have one day’s pike-fishing than have a dozen days of any other kind of fishing. The pike is such a savage brute, he rushes at your bait with such vigour and ferocity, his jaws close so firmly upon the fish which has lured him, he shakes his head so fiercely, and fights to the death with such tenacity and pluck, that one feels great pride

in subduing him. The captive trout or salmon gives more dashing play, no doubt ; but then these seem to be the struggles of mad terror, and a frantic desire to escape. The pike, on the other hand, shows no terror ; he fights you as an enemy would, with a great pleasure in the fight ; and if he succeeds in breaking away from you, he will even dash at your bait again, although his mouth may be lacerated by the former struggle. When he dies, he dies not in pitiful terror, but in splendid rage. One experiences no uncomfortable feelings of compassion, but rather a sense of well-won triumph. Then there are so many ways of fishing for him. You may troll with a dead-gorge bait in weedy pools beset with sunken roots and branches ; and then you have a delicious feeling of suspense for ten minutes or so while he gorges the bait. You may spin for him, your bait sliding over masses of tangled weed, and from out the lanes of clear water you will see his swift and splendid rush that sends your heart leaping into your mouth with excitement ; you may fly-fish for him with a huge fly, or trail a spoon-bait after your boat as you row round the Mere during an autumn gale ; and you may sit at ease in your punt, on a warm August day, and watch your large float bob with the movement of your live bait, and then dive down suddenly with the "run" of a pike. In all and each of these ways you will find much enjoyment and good sport.

The worst of it is, that good pike-waters are very hard of access nowadays. As a general rule they are strictly preserved, and where they are not so are over-fished and poached, so that they are scarcely worth a visit. Very often the best sport is to be had in deep pools in trout rivers, where the pike has made his home unnoticed, and where nobody thinks of fishing for him.

In spite of a commandment against envying one's neighbour's possessions, I always envy the man who has a good pike pool or river *all to himself* and his friends. For him there is no asking for leave and incurring an obligation. He can go when he pleases and have his fill of sport without having to ask any man for permission. The summit of my angling ambition is to possess a pike pool, or a right of fishing in one when I please. Now that I have made my wants known, perhaps some kind friend will step forward and give me that which I desire.

I have pike-fished in many waters, and have caught my fair share of pike, but up to the time of which I write I had never caught any really large fish. I had caught plenty of good-sized ones, up to ten or twelve pounds or so, but none of your monster fish of thirty, forty, and fifty pounds in weight. I had seen a friend catch one thirty-three pounds in weight, and that was the nearest I had ever been to a big fish. Many a time

I had gone to noted pike waters expecting to do wonders, and building very pleasing castles in the air, but the same confounded mediocrity always attended my efforts.

I was on a visit some little time ago in one of the Western Counties, and in the course of a picnic excursion we came upon a lake embosomed in woods, which at once took my fancy as the very *beau idéal* of a pike pool. It was surrounded with reeds and rushes. Its shores curved in many a quiet bay margined with lilies, where the coot and the water-hen swam with a tameness and sense of security which showed that they were not often disturbed. A light breeze was rippling the pool, and every now and then a rush of small fish out of the pool showed where the pike were chasing them. The remembrance of that pool quite haunted me for a long time to come, and the desire to fish in it was fanned by the tales which our host told me of the wondrously large pike which were to be caught there. It was strictly preserved, and very seldom fished. Some time afterwards I accidentally made the acquaintance of its owner. We became good friends—for the possession of this pike pool made him seem a very pleasant fellow in my eyes. I cunningly led him up to the subject of fishing, and to his pike pool, and the end of it was that he invited me to spend a short time with him at his house, and to help to kill some of its large pike; for

he was an angler, only his tastes ran upon salmon fishing, and nothing pleased him better than going to Norway.

A clear dry frosty night in January saw me with my legs under my friend's mahogany. We were to fish the Mere on the morrow, and everything was prepared for our sport. The gamekeeper had obtained a quantity of gudgeon from a neighbouring river, and they had been kept fresh and lively in a tank sunk in the Mere. Ere the coffee came in I had heard many wonderful stories about the immense fish that were to be caught in the Mere, and went to bed perfectly convinced that at last I was to realise my dreams, and catch some monster pike ; and I slept uneasily.

We were up and about on our way to the lake. It was a brilliantly bright morning—so dry and frosty that the stiff north-east wind blew golden clouds of dust along the roads. The sun, as he climbed over the oak plantation, threw his level beams across the undulating meadows, which were barred with steps of deep, dark, and brilliant light green, as they lay in sunlight or shadow.

We lost little time in embarking, and, selecting good-sized gudgeons, we baited our spinning tackle, and proceeded to trail our baits round the Mere. The wavelets leaped cheerily against the side of our boat, and the water-fowl swam lazily from before us, or flew

into the rustling reeds. The sheltered corners of the bays were coated with ice; the reeds were laid and rotted by the frost; the water was just the right colour, and it seemed a perfect day both for enjoyment and for sport. Our expectations were high, and it seemed as if they were to be realised. In the first round we caught six pike, but what rather astonished me was that they were all under five pounds in weight. When we were half-way round a second time, just off the mouth of a weedy bay, my rod gave a great lunge, and was nearly torn out of my hand. I struck, and it was evident that I was fast in a mighty fish.

“Keep him away from the weeds,” exclaimed my companion; “you have caught a whopper, and no mistake.”

There was no need for his caution to keep the fish away from the weeds. The pike made straight for the centre of the Mere, running out my line at a fearful rate. I let go the line grudgingly, for I expected him to make a dash back for the weeds, when my line would be doubled up and I should lose my fish. But the pike had no such intention. He went straight ahead, without pausing in his steady rush, until my line, which was eighty yards long, was nearly all out. I gave him the butt, and held on until I thought my rod would have broken, in the hope of turning him; but he still went on, and

then, as my rod was stanch and my line was strong, our boat began to move after the pike.

"By Jove! this is wonderful," said my friend. "You have hooked a leviathan. Play him steadily and skillfully, and don't get excited."

Now that was very good advice if it could be carried out, but as the speaker was already white and trembling with excitement, and I was, if anything, worse, his advice was not of much use. Well, I stood in the bows of the boat, and the monster towed us with increasing swiftness right across the lake, which was about a quarter of a mile broad at this part. When we came to the weeds at the other side of the Mere he turned back again, and to prevent undue strain on the rod in turning the boat, I ran to the other end of it, and we were towed back again in precisely the same way, and at a fair three miles an hour pace. Our excitement was fast turning to awe when, on reaching the other side of the Mere, the brute turned again and began to make a slow *détour* of the lake, stopping every now and then to sulk at the bottom, but never allowing us to get back much of our line, or to catch a glimpse of him. In this way two hours passed away, and the case began to assume a serious aspect.

"Don't get into a funk, old man. I have seen salmon take very much longer to kill; and I have

heard of one being on nineteen hours at a stretch, and when he was caught he was not a very big one, either."

"Aye, that is all very well for a salmon, but a pike does not fight so long. I saw a thirty-three pounder killed in a quarter of an hour, so this must be a veritable shark."

Well, matters went on in this way until four hours had elapsed, and still we seemed no nearer to the end. Then seventy yards away there was a huge "boil" at the top of the water, and the strain on the rod slackened.

"Hurrah! there he is. He is beginning to give in. It will only be a short time now."

My friend was right. Little by little I wound in my line, and nearer and nearer the monster came. At last we could distinctly see him rushing and wallowing about with widely-distended mouth, in the clear water. In length he was about five feet, and his weight, it is clear, must have been eighty pounds. What a proud man I felt at that moment! All my hopes were on the point of being realised. I drew him slowly and carefully in, and my friend struck the gaff into him, and then our united efforts——

"Hallo! what's that knocking for?"

"Here's your hot-water, sir, and breakfast will be ready in half an hour."

“ Oh ! murder ! Where is the big pike ! ” I exclaimed, looking about. Alas ! It was only a dream.

I had very good sport that day and the following, but *not a fish was over ten pounds in weight*, and my big pike has yet to be caught.

ON SOME ODD WAYS OF FISHING.

THE maxim that one half the world does not know how the other half lives may, with but slight variation, be applied to the world of sportsmen. The "sportsman" is not of any particular class. The highest in the land and the lowest may rub shoulders in the broad field of sport. This is peculiarly true as regards the gentle art. Wandering by the side of an unpreserved stream you may see my lord casting a fly over this shallow, and, twenty yards farther down, Tinker Ben seated by the side of a chub hole watching his float circling round in the eddy; and as the noble passes the boor an honest angler's greeting may be exchanged, and a light for the latter's pipe asked for and given. It may be taken as a general rule that between anglers who pursue their sport by fair means there is a levelling freemasonry of the craft which is as pleasant as it is right.

Between the fair fisherman and the poacher there is, however, a broad line of demarcation—a line which

bars the interchange of even the commonest civilities on the mutual ground] of pursuing the same object. The fair fisherman hates the man who captures the finny tribe by unfair or illegal means as strongly as a fox-hunter hates a fox-killer, or a strict Sabbatarian hates a sinner who enjoys a Sunday afternoon's walk and the glimpses of nature it may afford him. There is also a line drawn between the man who fishes for amusement alone and him who fishes for profit. The division in the latter instance may not be so broad as in the former, but nevertheless it is wide enough to distinctly separate the two classes. Now, we think the fair and amateur angler is, in a great many instances, unaware of the shifts and dodges adopted by the poacher and pot-hunter to fill their pockets, and of the consequent hindrance to his own sport. Therefore, by way of warning, of information, and possible amusement, we have noted down a few of the instances which have come under our own observation. And as we do not expect any poacher to read this book our revelations will do no harm by way of suggestion.

Let any one take a boat and row down the sluggish Yare from the commission-haunted old city of Norwich, as the shades of evening are darkening the river, and he will see several uncouth rough-looking boats being slowly impelled down stream by rougher-looking men. He will notice that they have short, stout rods and long poles

in the boats, and if he watches them he will presently see them take up their stations by the margin of some reed bed, or in a quiet bay of the river. Driving the poles in the mud at the stems and sterns of their boats the men make them fast, and taking their seats proceed to "bob" for eels. A quantity of earthworms are strung on worsted, and, after being weighted, are suspended by a stout line from a short, thick rod. The solitary fisherman holds a rod in each hand, on each side of the boat, just feeling the bottom with the bait, and now and then pulling it up and shaking the eels, whose teeth get entangled in the worsted, into the boat. There he sits, silent and uncommunicative the greater part of the night, and in all weathers, for the sake, perhaps, of, on an average, a shilling's worth of eels each night. Altogether his berth must be a lonely one, and no angler will grudge him his sport. His companions take up their positions too far off to hold conversation with him, and the splash of a water-rat among the reeds, or the flapping of the canvas of a belated wherry, and the cheery good-night of its steersman are the only sounds to beguile the tedium of his midnight watching.

Another mode of capturing eels is by "eel picking" in the lower waters of the Yare, near Cantley. The man, armed with his eel spear, takes his stand in the bow of his craft, and, stealing along by the edge of

the reeds, plunges his spear at random in the mud. He uses his spear also as the means of propelling his tiny boat. We have seen four or five boats following each other along the side of the river in a queer-looking procession.

Those centres of interest to the angler, the Norfolk broads, are, alas! the strongholds of poaching. Norfolk anglers plead their great expanse of water as an excuse for "liggering" or setting trimmers, to an enormous extent. Taking Norfolk anglers as a class, if they can "ligger" they will. The amount of destruction thus occasioned is something wonderful. The only time we ever yielded to the temptation of going with a friend "liggering" we are thankful to say we caught nothing, and we are not in a hurry to repeat the experiment. Yarrell gives an account of four days' "sport" (?) at Heigham Sounds and Horsea, where, in 1834, in the month of March, when the pike breed, his informants caught in that space of time 256 pike, weighing altogether 1135 pounds. What wonder that it is now difficult to get really good sport at these places with rod and line!

Our favourite fish, the tench, has a bad habit of basking on the surface of some of these broads on hot summer days, in weedy bays, where he deems himself perfectly secure. But the amphibious broadsman paddles quietly up to him, and actually scoops him out with

his hand. You may touch the fish's body with your hand and he will not move ; but if you touch his tail he darts away.

We have seen a somewhat similar thing in shallow pools in Shropshire. When the big carp come to the side to spawn their bodies are half out of the water, and they may be approached and shovelled out with a spade.

In the reeds adjoining the carp-pool we once found a murderous instrument which was used by a gang of sawyers at work in the adjacent wood for destroying the basking carp. It consisted of a large, flat piece of wood, in which were set long nails, like the teeth of a garden rake. This was attached to a long pole, and woe betide the unfortunate carp upon whose back it descended !

Groping for trout in the shallow streams is a well-known amusement of country boys ; but the dastardly and cruel practice of liming a brook is not now so often resorted to as it used to be. We have seen it done in a mountain brook, when, on account of our extreme youth, we were powerless to prevent it ; and a schoolboy notion of honour prevented our peaching. A shovelful of quicklime is taken up the brook to some shallow ford, and then thrown into the water and triturated, so that the stream carries it in a milk-white stream downwards. In a short time the poachers follow, and pick up the trout, which are floating dead on the surface, or swimming in circles on the top of the water, with scorched

and blinded eyeballs. The lime penetrates into every crevice of the stream-bed, and if it does not kill every trout within its range it cruelly tortures all. We still remember the sickening sense of shame that crept over us as, unwilling participators in the outrage, we crept over the mossy ground ; when the noise made by every water-ouzel that took wing, and every sheep that leaped down the hillside, seemed to herald the approach of a keeper, with the awful penalties of the law in his train.

Diverting the course of a brook, and emptying the pools of their water, and afterwards of their fish, is a long operation, and therefore not so frequently resorted to ; but that poaching instrument called the two-pole net we have known to clear many a nice little pool in a stream of its spotted denizens.

In Cardiganshire it is the practice for men to go up the streams armed with a sledge hammer, with which they strike the big stones in the brook. The concussion stuns the fish, and they are easily picked up afterwards.

Do our readers know what a "cleeching-net" is ? It is in effect a magnified landing-net at the end of a long pole, with the lower part of the rim straight. Its use is to "grab" fish from under clumps of weed and overhanging banks. We once had one made for the purpose of catching bait, and a ludicrous accident occurred to a friend of ours who used it. He plunged it

in too far from the side, where the water was deeper than he imagined, and the consequence was that he fell forward, his feet still on the bank, and his hands resting on the top of the pole within a foot of the water, into which he gradually subsided, in spite of our efforts to pull him back by the slack of his trousers.

We have seen the cleeching-net used in a very effective manner by bargees on canals. As their vessel is towed along they put the net into the water alongside the bows, and walk back to the stern as the boat moves, so as to keep the net in the same position. The rush of the water, displaced by the passage of the barge, drives a good many fish into the net; and we have even known fair-sized pike to be captured in this way.

Once we were cruising down the Severn, and had moored our canoe under some bushes in a very secluded part of the river, to take our mid-day rest. Presently we saw two men in coracles coming down the river. They stopped just opposite us and commenced to net the river with a small-meshed net. They paid the net out in a semicircle, and then, beating the water with their paddles, they closed and completed the circle, and with their coracles side by side hauled their net in. It was a caution to see the fish they had caught. Great chub of five, and one of nine pounds in weight. Roach, pike, and dace—in half an hour they had caught a great number. They looked frightened enough when

we shot out from our hiding-place and examined their sport and their net.

Among other odd, or at least unorthodox, ways of fishing, may be reckoned setting night lines, in which art the Norfolk yachtsmen are no mean proficient, netting the smelts which crowd up the Yare at certain seasons of the year, in the heart of the city, and by the light of flaring torches;—netting the weedy pools in Cheshire with a flue-net;—the catching tench in hoop-nets baited with a bunch of flowers or an old brass candle-stick, which attract the too curious fish;—eel-bags and weirs, and the large eel-nets set in the Bure below Acle;—leistering salmon and snaring pike;—snatching fish by casting a bundle of hooks into the water and dragging it rapidly over the fish;—the use of salmon-roë and other too deadly means of compassing the destruction of the finny tribe. We fancy, however, that we have said enough to call to the angler's remembrance that his rod and line have formidable rivals, and that it behoves him to do all in his power to suppress and punish illegal and unfair sport, yet, at the same time, to allow sufficient liberty to those whose subsistence depends upon the capture of fish.

AN ANGLER'S ROMANCE.

BACHELORS and old maids! How is it that they respectively continue in a state of single blessedness? The general opinion undoubtedly is that men remain single because they don't choose to marry, and women become old maids because no one wants to marry them. Yet how often it happens that the facts of each case are not so bald and commonplace as general opinion will have it they are. How often the memory of a sad romance is interwoven with the fast-increasing years of an old bachelor or old maid! Could one know all, there is no class of people so deserving of our sympathy and affection.

Most people have some one tale to tell of the lost youth of some unmarried friend. How this one was jilted, yet never forgot his old love. How that other lost her lover at sea, and has ever remained faithful to his memory. Truly, there is many a sad story among the most prosaic of lives.

Every one wondered why Mark Hepworth had

never married. Handsome in face and person, tall and strongly built, the absolute owner, ever since his twenty-first year, of a fine estate ; he had been considered an eligible match, and could have had his choice of dozens of young ladies, each one of whom would have made him a good and loving wife. He was not a misanthrope, but a pleasant, manly fellow, fond of society, and particularly fond of children. Yet at fifty-four he was unmarried. His friends wondered greatly that he had not taken to himself a wife long years ago. Even now, his figure was erect, his gait vigorous, and the light of his eye undimmed. He would have found it no difficult matter to obtain a wife even at this late period of his life. But Mark Hepworth was a confirmed bachelor. He was also a most enthusiastic fisherman ; although, strange to say, as a young man he professed every aversion to the gentle art.

I, though many years younger than Mark, was the intimate friend of his middle age ; and although our friendship was almost boyish in its perfection and strength, I had failed to learn why it was that he had not married. I had often asked him, but he had not satisfied my curiosity, although there was that in his manner which led me to believe that he had some good and secret reason for his celibacy.

We had been enjoying a very fine and beautiful spring, and I was tempted to take a short holiday, and

pay a visit to my friend Mark. The morning after my arrival he said to me :

“Now, George, we must have some fishing to-day. The March browns will be on the water, and the trout ought to take the fly beautifully. Did you bring any fishing-tackle with you?”

“No, Mark, I did not.”

“Then come into my study and I will soon fit you out.”

We went into his study—a room such as I always longed to possess. The mixture of literature and sport, work and relaxation, which its contents suggested, called up most delightful visions.

“There is a rod for you, George, which, if you haven’t lost your old skill, will cast a fly a marvellous distance. Just open that drawer, and you will find plenty of tackle—ah! there is my old fly-book which I always use. The smaller one will do capitally for you. It is well stocked, I know, although I have not used it since I was a boy.”

Duly armed, we sauntered over the park, which was starred so prettily with daisies; between high-hedged lanes, where the bushes were clothed with a fresh, vivid green; and so through the scented larch wood, which was still wet with a slight shower, its feathery eaves of foliage shining with emerald sparkles.

All through that sunshining morning we wandered

by the river-side, through groves of giant butterbur, over mossy carpets golden with celandine, by rushy spots where grew the flesh-white cardamine, or "lady's-smock," and by the side of a clear sparkling stream. Oh, the delight of running water! And then the great trout we took, all under eight inches in length being returned to the water.

Then we halted for lunch, and afterwards, while the smoke of our cigars went curling upwards through the alder branches, I amused myself by searching through the pocket-book Mark had lent me, and discussing the merits of the various artificial flies it contained. In one of the parchment pockets there was a piece of paper, evidently a cutting from a newspaper. I took it out and read the following advertisement :

"Wanted, Copying by a Lady. No offer refused. Address A. Y., Post Office, Broxbourne."

"Wherefore was that so carefully preserved?" I asked, carelessly, handing the slip of paper to Hepworth. I was surprised at the sudden change which came over him. He had been very jovial indeed before, and now the ruddy glow deserted his cheek, and left it deadly pale. He gazed long and intently at the advertisement, and then he said to me :

"What a strange chance that you should find this, George. Thirty years ago I mislaid it, and to think of it turning up now. The greatest happiness and the

greatest sorrow of my life arose out of that advertisement."

He said no more at that time, and I did not choose to question him. All the rest of that day he seemed miserable and out of sorts, and while we were sitting over our wine that evening, he suddenly said :

"I am going to tell you, George, what I have never told to anyone else, and that is, the reason why I have never married. You know that when I was young I was passionately fond of literature."

"And that fondness has supplied a favourite corner of my book-shelves," interrupted I.

"Well, well, I wrote a great deal of rubbish at one time. But when I was twenty-three I was engaged in writing a book which I fondly hoped would secure me fame. I had finished the rough draft of it, and I wanted it copied. I never was fond of the manual labour of writing, and I dreaded the idea of copying my book myself. One day I saw that advertisement. The words 'no offer refused,' made me regard it with some attention. There was such a world of pathos in them. The advertisement clearly showed to me that it was penned by some reduced gentlewoman. I was smitten with pity for the lady, who was so poor that she would copy manuscript for the merest pittance. It was a pitiful plea for help which I could not resist, so I wrote to the address given, stating what I wished

to be copied, and asking for a specimen of handwriting. An answer came by return of post, accompanied by a sheet of foolscap covered with neat, square writing, which did not look very much like a woman's. It was plain and easily to be read, therefore it would do admirably. The writer's name was Alice Young. In her letter she said she hoped I should find her writing satisfactory, and if I decided upon employing her, she begged that I would give her work to do immediately, as she was in great need. I went down to Broxbourne (I was living in London then), and I saw her. She lived in a little cottage, no better than a labourer's, but she was unmistakably a lady. She was short and slightly built, but her face was very beautiful, with a sad, unearthly kind of beauty. I think it was her eyes which most fascinated me. They were large, brown, and lustrous, with an immeasurable depth of soul in them. Her hair was brown, and very luxuriant. After once seeing her I could never forget her. She lived with an invalid sister, far gone in consumption, and a young brother, too young to do anything to help them. They were in the deepest poverty. I questioned Alice, and soon learned their history. It was the old story—a father unfortunate in business. He had been a tea merchant in the City, and died leaving a widow and children unprovided for, the hopeless, uncomplaining struggle for existence which followed on her part

ending in her death and the present friendless condition of her children. There is no need to dwell upon the story. Well, I had brought paper, pens, and ink with me, for I did not expect her to be well provided with them, and I set Miss Alice down to a long afternoon's copying, while I strolled about and made a few inquiries about her. I paid her a price for that afternoon's copying which would have astonished a law stationer. Day after day I took her fresh batches of manuscript. I was too cunning to take it all at once, for that would only have meant one visit instead of twenty. To make a long story short, I fell deeply in love with her, and you know it is not my nature to do things by halves. When the copying of the book was finished—and I may say that the price I paid for it completely absorbed my share of the profit which afterwards accrued to me—I employed her to assist me in correcting the proofs. At last the book made its appearance, and there was no more work for her to do. I could easily have got her some more copying to do from friends of mine, who were amateur authors—professionals don't take the trouble to have their MS. copied—but then she would have found out the deceit I had practised upon her. She was under the blissful delusion that copying was quite a lucrative business. When I placed the book in her hands which she had assisted to produce, she was so delighted that I felt

fully repaid for the trouble of writing it, and wished for no further fame than to be famous in her eyes.

“Then, one day, unknown to me, she advertised again for copying to do, and then she found out what prices her work really could command. When I next went to see her she was very sad and tearful, and her manner towards me was changed. I could not stand it, and I asked her to be my wife. She was very grateful, but she did not jump at the offer, as I had half expected, and she asked for time to consider. I gave her time, and then she asked me if I would take care of her sister and brother if she married me. Of course I promised to do so, and then she said she would be my wife. It was a happy time for me then. I took lodgings at Broxbourne, and we had pleasant walks amid the rose gardens in the neighbourhood ; we boated on the Lea, and she read to me while I fished ; or we would row up to the mill, and I would sketch the ancient and picturesque structure, with its splendid willow bending over the stream where it issued from the black archway of the grey stone bridge.

“I could not get her to fix the wedding-day for a long time, but at last it was fixed, and I was deliriously happy.

“I have said that she and her relatives were friendless. In the practical sense of the word they were so. There was one, however, who had been a frequent visitor of

theirs, and whose visits grew less as mine grew more frequent. His name was Langford. He was a clerk in some office in London, and he went to and fro each day. He was a tall, pale-faced fellow, and was very shy and retiring. He was an orphan, and his salary was but small, and I fancy the similarity of their positions drew him and the Youngs together. He had been a great friend of Mrs. Young's, and after her death he did all that he could to aid her children. After Alice and I were engaged his visits entirely ceased, and when he met Alice in the road he only bowed and passed on. I noticed that he seemed to grow paler and thinner each day after we were engaged ; and when we met him, as we often did those summer evenings, I saw that Alice looked after him with a strange, wistful look. I felt so secure in her promise to marry me, which I took to imply love, that I did not trouble myself about these glances of hers, but set them down to a womanly pity for a friend who was ill, as he seemed to be.

"The very day before our marriage was to take place I went to see her. I came upon her rather unexpectedly. She was in tears, crying over a photograph and a letter. The photograph was Langford's."

Here Mark's voice grew husky, and he had to drink off a glass of wine ere he resumed.

"Then the truth came out. She loved Langford, but he could not afford to marry her, and to keep

her brother and sister, and he and she had decided that it was right for them to give up their own happiness for the sake of her brother and sister, and that she ought to accept my offer. She did so, honestly meaning to make me a good and true wife, and to endeavour to learn to love me.

"The blow was a very bitter one to me, but what was I to do? I loved her too well to make her unhappy by marrying her, so I got Langford a situation which enabled him to marry her and keep her comfortably, and I took upon myself the charge of her brother and sister. The former is now doing very well in trade in London, but his sister died very soon after Alice's marriage. I suppose I did what was right, but I never lost my love for her, and I should deem it a sin to marry another woman while that love is in my heart."

"Is she alive now?" I asked, timidly.

"No, George. She died four years after she married, childless. When she died, it was no sin to own my love to myself, for she was then no man's wife, and I had an oil picture painted from her photograph. It is very like her. Come and see it."

He led the way to his bedroom, and then, pointing to a blank space in the panelled wall, he said, with a smile, "You would not think there was anything there, would you?"

He touched a spring, and the panel flew back, exposing the portrait of a lovely girl, with an uneasy far-away look in the large dark eyes.

“There, George, that panel is opened, and that face is with me every night of my life.”

I learnt afterwards, too, that it was only in fishing wanderings that he found any real peace and rest from the memory of that face.

THE END.

